MUSTARD LEAVES

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MUSTARD LEAVES

OR

A GLIMPSE OF LONDON SOCIETY

By D. T. S.

"A chiel's amang ye takin' notes,
And faith, he'll prent it."
ROBERT BURNS.

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MUSTARD LEAVES;

OR,

A GLIMPSE OF LONDON SOCIETY.

CHAPTER I.

"Do you believe it's true, neighbour, that Squire Gordon's folks are off to Europe?"

"That's what they say; and I could believe most any foolishness of those two. I guess it's so."

"It's true as gospel. Mrs. Gordon's hired help told my Jake so this morning when he carried the milk over. They are going before the week's out."

The place is a small wooden room, dignified by the name of post-office, in a New Hampshire village which nestles in a lovely valley, near the White Mountains; the speakers a group of farmers, hardy sons of the "Granite State," who are awaiting the arrival of the mail-bag.

The elections, and political doings at Washington, are the excitement of the day, and opinions run high over the respective chances of the Republican aud Democratic candidates for President. Politics, however, have for the moment lost their interest, in the startling announcement that Squire Gordon's folks are going to Europe.

Not many years ago Squire Gordon had himself been the central figure among these rural politicians, but now a mighty monument in the hundred-year-old churchyard records his many virtues, beneath which he rests, after a busy, honest life. During the two years which have elapsed since his death, his widow and child have remained quietly in the northern village, affording much interest, and exciting no little disapproval among the good people of Ashton, for their manner of life differs in many respects from that of those around them, a fact human nature is prone to resent in its fellows.

"And to think all the money made in my store is to be spent in furrin parts!" chuckled old Tom Morris, an authority in the village, whose pride in life was the irregular pile of buildings called "Morris' Store." "He was a good fellow," added the deaf postmaster, leaning over the open window through which a few

minutes later he would dispense letters and papers to the expectant company—"that is, Squire himself was, and I don't say the widder is not the right kind, but as for that slip of a daughter of theirs, she's just the most aggravating girl I ever did see."

"You're about right there, Tompkins," volunteered a good-looking young farmer, who spoke with a touch of bitterness in his voice not suited to his cheery countenance; "she's above all of us since the Squire gave up the shop and took to living like a gentleman."

"You mean since that English lord took such notice of her," interrupted the handsome surgeon, who had striven in vain to win the good graces of the village beauty, dark-eyed Maggie Gordon.

"I suppose that dandy Britisher is what takes them to the old country," growled Tompkins, preparing to close the post-office window.

At this juncture all further discussion was brought to an end by the arrival of the mail-bag, and a little later the gathering of weather-beaten farmers, the surgeon, and the young fellow who had announced that Maggie Gordon was "above them now," had all gone their several ways—the post-office was deserted.

Old Jim Gordon, although dubbed "Squire"

by his neighbours, was almost as rough a specimen as any of the men who have just been discussing him and his "folks." A shrewd business talent had, however, caused him to rise rapidly from being a clerk in Morris' store, first to partner, and finally to full proprietor, for eventually he had bought out old Morris entirely, at the same time extending his business so rapidly that with his hardly earned gold he was able to retire and live at ease, continuing his interest in the store, whilst leaving Morris in actual possession. His wife was a delicate, refined woman, who had come to New Hampshire at the time of her marriage, but who had never been able to adapt herself to the mode of life there, whilst the child Margaret had a passionate hatred for both place and people, longing for another life, which she felt sure must exist beyond the purple hills, whose beauty she could not see because they shut her in to the narrow existence she abhorred, and closed all vision of the tempting outer world.

Any one who has been long in New England must have noticed the great superiority, in both appearance and manners, of the women over the men; further, where girls and boys together attend the State Normal Schools, all statistics show how much more readily the girls learn than

the boys, and the education given at these schools is not only thorough but extensive.

Maggie Gordon, besides being the acknowledged beauty of Ashton, was also the show scholar of the Normal School, and very proud was rough old Squire Jim when his child carried off all the honours in succession, which, to do her justice, were fairly deserved.

Ashton is the last station reached by rail in going to the White Mountains, and one of the amusements of the inhabitants is to watch the daily departure of the rumbling old stage-coach with its load of sight-seers, starting sometimes in the broiling summer sun, when linen dusters and thick green veils are necessary additions to travelling costumes; oftener still in the glorious autumn days, when the life-giving air is as exhilarating as sparkling wine, and when the whole country-side is ablaze with colour; masses of crimson, and scarlet, and gold foliage glowing flame-like over the hills. Not even Italy herself can then rival the sapphire skies, whilst the misty purple of the mountains against which the dark fir-trees stand tall and straight adds another beauty to a picture impossible to find except in the American fall.

On such a day in the month of October, about six weeks before our tale begins, Margaret

Gordon and her mother stopped before the great railway hotel from whence the coach starts on its trips to the Profile House, a favourite halting-place on the road to Mount Washington.

She was very fair, this slender New England maiden, who for seventeen years now had called the village of Ashton home, and under the soft creamy skin the colour flushed and deepened with every change of feeling, whilst the shapely head had a proud little way of being fearlessly raised when the large eyes, full of expression, looked upon the people of this puzzling world. The sunbeams dancing lightly by flecked the wavy brown hair with warm touches of gold as the girl stood quite still, quietly watching the passengers settling themselves and their effects for a five-hour drive.

"I say, Egerton, there's a beauty! By Jove, she is simply stunning! Do look, my dear fellow, there, standing with that group of women!" and in his excitement Lord George Standish very nearly sent his friend and fellow-traveller, the Honourable Granvill Egerton, over the top of the coach.

"Confound you, George, do be careful. I was as nearly off as I care to be. What the deuce do you want?"

"Why, look, man, if you care to see a prettier

face than any to be found last season, you can see one now; even Lady Helen herself would be nowhere beside that girl!"

Being by this time securely seated on top of the somewhat rickety vehicle, and in no danger of instant death from his friend's energetic attempts to attract his attention, Mr. Egerton calmly placed his eye-glass in his right eye, and turned in the direction from which Lord George's gaze had not wandered since he first caught a glimpse of Maggie standing in the sunshine.

"Yes, she is lovely," he at last answered; "quite lovely, no mistake about that; but I fail to see how her undoubted charms can affect us, since we are just off, never to return."

"Granvill, let us give up the White Mountains—at least, I mean, we can go there later. I must know who this girl is. Be quick, man, shall we stop?"

"Stop! my dear fellow, are you quite off your head? Our plans are all made, luggage on—"

"Oh, bother the plans and the luggage. Well, you go on if you like, I will join you to-morrow;" and before the idea had fairly entered the Hon. Granvill Egerton's head that his friend could by any chance be serious, that energetic youth had jumped down from the coach, and was

rapidly explaining to the tall and lank hotel-keeper that one particular portmanteau must be left behind, as he meant to stop a day in Ashton.

Mr. Egerton regarded all his friend's proceedings through the inevitable eye-glass, and placidly remarking that he would wait for him two days at Mount Washington, but no longer, lit a cigar and continued gazing critically at fair Maggie Gordon. Had it from the beginning been in their programme that at this point of the journey his noble friend should fling himself wildly from the top of a stage-coach, and change all his plans for the sake of a pair of dark eyes he had never seen before, Mr. Egerton could not have been more unmoved; in fact, he had not yet discovered the circumstance in life capable of moving him, or for one moment destroying his well-bred composure.

Meanwhile, the cause of all this excitement stood quietly watching the various travellers, as unmoved as the Honourable Granvill himself. Margaret was conscious that both the strangers had looked admiringly at her, but she was too well accustomed to this to feel astonished. Not being near enough to hear their conversation, consequently not understanding the meaning of the curious gymnastics executed by the younger

of the two men, she watched them without any especial interest until the unwieldy old coach departed, leaving the good-looking stranger behind. At this the girl did puzzle her brain for a moment, but no longer, for it was almost post time, to Margaret the most exciting hour of the day.

"I suppose you wish to wait for the letters, child; as I have an errand at the store I will walk on;" and Mrs. Gordon turned to go up the hill as her daughter went in the opposite direction, passing the hotel piazza on her way to the post-office.

"How's mother, Maggie?" shouted the hotel-keeper, heartily and familiarly, but never a word did the girl vouchsafe in answer. With crimson cheeks and blazing eyes she hurried on, furious that before this elegant stranger odious Grove, her pet aversion in the village, should dare so to speak to her.

With a loud laugh, the man announced that of all the stuck-up little minxes it had been his misfortune to behold, that was the worst.

"Who is the lady?" asked the Englishman, inwardly disgusted with his companion, but determined to gain all possible information from him.

"Why, she's old Squire Gordon's daughter;

he was the richest man in our village, and was that soft over this girl you'd have thought she was made of breakable china. Never a bit of work has she done in her life, I dare venture to say, and there's no putting up with her."

"But why should she work if her father was rich, and she is a lady?"

The Yankee stared at his questioner, and then gave utterance to the single word, "How?"

George Standish repeated his remark.

"What's she got two hands for, if she wasn't meant to use them? that's what *I* should like to know, sir. In this country labour is honourable, and yet, if you can believe it, those people have two helps to wait on them, and the girl is just good for nothing. But now, sir, what can I do for you? I guess you'll find the time hang heavy in Ashton if you've no friends here. Folks don't stop except to have a bite and go on in the coach."

"Is there anything of interest in the neighbourhood; any old ruin to visit, or that sort of thing?"

"Well, I guess we're not much on ruins out here, we like to see things fresh and new, plenty of paint and whitewash."

The twinkle in the fellow's eye as he spoke made Lord George Standish, second son of His

Grace the Duke of Babylon, feel just a trifle uncomfortable. He had a vaguely unpleasant idea that this Yankee was laughing at him.

"Ah! I shall just take a little stroll, then. What is your dinner-hour?"

"Dinner, well, I reckon that was dinner you had when the train came in: supper at six o'clock is the next meal."

"Ah! thanks,"—and the Englishman turned away, wondering whether he had not been a trifle precipitate in deserting his friend. When he reached the post-office, however, he changed his opinion.

Standing apart from the crowd awaiting the distribution of letters, was the graceful figure in its dark, well-fitting dress, a tuft of scarlet feathers in the dark hat, and a few leaves of the scarlet maple fastened at her waist.

CHAPTER II.

Lord George Standish had never been noted for his shyness, but was on the contrary widely renowned for wild escapades. A woman's beauty he never resisted, and his conquests had certainly been serious enough in quantity and quality to lead him to believe that he was well-nigh irresis-

tible. In truth his presence in the New World was due less to a desire of extending his geographical knowledge than to the fact that he had played rather too prominent a part in a recent society divorce case in the old country, and even his best friends thought a few months' absence desirable under the circumstances. This lovely Phyllis was the first woman who had excited his admiration since landing from the Atlantic steamer, a few weeks before, and he determined to lose no time in making the girl's acquaintance. Accordingly, lifting his hat, he turned to Margaret Gordon with the frank, winning smile which had won many less simple hearts than hers, and said quietly,—

"I beg your pardon, but can you tell me if the post just in is from Boston or New York?"

"From both," was the equally quiet answer; "we have only two mails a day."

"Thanks; I am expecting important letters to meet me here, and wished to make no mistake in the post."

Having softly uttered this most audacious lie, the Englishman bowed again, and with difficulty turned his eyes away from the lovely face, where the colour had deepened as he spoke. Almost immediately the window opened, and after the general rush had been made, and the room left

almost empty, Maggie Gordon stretched one slim hand through the casement, and received a large blue envelope, directed in manly characters and post-marked Mount Washington. All this could George Standish see as he stood behind her, when suddenly he bethought himself of those important epistles he himself was supposed to be waiting for, and showed much concern when nothing for Mr. George Standish could be found.

"How very tiresome! then I must wait another day, and what am I to do with myself in the meantime!"

At this dismal exclamation the dark eyes were raised from the letter Maggie Gordon was eagerly devouring by the window of the little office.

"We have another mail at seven this evening," she said shyly.

"Ah! thank you so much; and is that also from both Boston and New York?"

At this question the girl laughed outright, a thoroughly musical laugh, whilst the lovely eyes were full of a happy light, and the two rows of pearly teeth were fairly dazzling.

"Of course it will be from both," she explained in a frank, childlike manner, "because you cannot get to this forlorn place from *anywhere*, unless you pass through Boston."

"I see; but you must pardon my ignorance.

I have only just come to your country, and I do not know much about the routes. We had heard so much of Ashton and its beauties that we came on here first"—and on he plunged, wildly making the most incoherent statements only to keep her for a few minutes longer, to look at her, and make her talk.

"Heard of *Ashton!*" she exclaimed, with wide-open eyes. "Why, no one ever comes here to stay; they only pass through to the White Mountains. To think of any one wanting to stay in Ashton!"

"But it is very beautiful, and I think I shall stop; at least, until those letters come."

"Beautiful! You think *Ashton* beautiful?"

"Yes, I think it lovely"—this with an admiring look at the girl herself, which he mentally decided no female thing on earth, save herself, could possibly have misunderstood; but the fair face, instead of flushing consciously under his too ardent gaze, only darkened as she said in low passionate tones, turning away from him as she spoke,—

"And I *hate* it!"

Fearing she would leave him without another word, the Englishman hastily added,—

"Pray pardon me again, but you have been so kind, dare I trespass still further and ask if there

is anything to be done or seen here? I must wait for those letters, and I shall be bored to death."

"Come to mother," the girl said simply; "she always knows what to do, and she has just gone home. But perhaps you are hungry, or did you feed with Grove's Menagerie, as I call the railway dinner?"

"I had a sort of luncheon there as we were going on—I mean to say that five-hour pull from Boston is pretty long, and this frosty air gives one an appetite; but the innkeeper told me that was dinner, and warned me not to expect anything else until supper, at six o'clock."

"Oh, yes; that impertinent Grove has dinner at twelve, for the people who come by the trains. You see three or four come in at the same time; and he gives the passengers very little time to eat, and makes them pay for all they leave. In fact, he is odious, and I hate him; I hate them all," she added passionately; "and I watch the coach every day, because some day I hope to go away too—but there is mother"—and the child hurried on and spoke to a comely woman, who stood shading her eyes from the brilliant October sunshine, near the entrance of a large stone dwelling. George Standish's heart sank for a moment as he wondered how the mamma would

approve of her daughter escorting a strange young man to her house in this eccentric manner, but he had little time for reflection. One hand rested on the girl's shoulder as they stood together, the other Mrs. Gordon held out cordially to the Englishman.

"My little daughter tells me that you are obliged to stay in Ashton, and are left to the mercy of the hotel-keeper; we shall be so glad if you will share our dinner, which is just ready."

No fashionable entertainer in Mayfair or Belgravia ever welcomed a new foreign ambassador with more quiet cordiality and dignity, and the son of His Grace of Babylon found himself putting forth all his powers of fascination, when, after having introduced himself as Mr. Standish, an Englishman, he found himself seated between the two ladies at an abundantly-spread table, where his ignorance of the names of half the dishes caused much amusement. He was duly introduced to pork and beans, squash, pumpkin pies, and finally molasses, and when, after the hearty meal, he found himself smoking a cigar in the old apple orchard, with lovely Maggie Gordon for his companion, he did not regret the decision of the morning, but reproached himself, to his own intense astonishment, that he had even slightly deceived these charming, simple people who

accepted his every statement as absolute truth. However, that fiction of the letters had served him well, and must be continued.

For some two hours now had the favourite of London drawing-rooms been lazily enjoying the perfect day, and the fragrance of a good cigar, while listening to the New England girl's amusing chatter, for she talked as a woodland bird would sing, of everything and nothing, using words which sometimes puzzled him immensely, but which upon being investigated he discovered to be either forcibly original, or else quaint old English expressions, found nowadays only in Chaucer's poems or works of an equally early date.

He was astonished at the extent of the child's reading, until she proudly informed him that for some time past Ashton had been in possession of a circulating library, supported by voluntary contributions. She was delighted when Mr. Standish asked whether he might be allowed to contribute ten dollars to this same wonderful library, in remembrance of his pleasant day in Ashton.

At this question she produced from her pocket the blue envelope he had already seen at the post-office, and tenderly taking therefrom a long, closely-written epistle, she remarked that only

that very day a friend had sent her a list of new books it would be well for her to read, and explained further, that whenever any one sent a donation to the library they had at the same time the privilege of mentioning what books should be bought.

"You know you can send any list you like, because you give the money, but I *do* so want some of these."

Mr. Standish hastened to assure her that any list he could make out would, he felt quite sure, be inferior to the one she had; might he be allowed to look at that.

Carefully folding down part of the page, rosy red the while, she handed him her letter.

"But these names seem very serious," he said, reading title after title of works whose names he had never heard.

"Do you think I should not understand them all?" she asked wistfully. "You see the gentleman who sent them is going to be a minister, and he likes serious things."

"Oh, I understand, and he wants you to like the things he likes; but where is he going to be minister, abroad or at Washington?"

"No, no, not there yet, he must have a little church first, somewhere in the country; but not here, I would not live here, because I hate it so."

"Now I begin to comprehend; a minister, you mean what we call a parson, and you are going to help the parson take care of the church and all the people—capital, I see it all now."

George Standish smiled at the thought of this lovely child, who was born to turn the heads of men, settling down quietly in the country, as wife of some prim Puritan who could advise her reading such books as these.

"But not yet, not for such a long time," she added naïvely; "you see he is not a minister yet, he is very poor, and so proud he will earn all his own money, and will not allow me to give him mine, so we must wait ever so long, and it is very hard to wait."

She looked so childlike yet so unhappy, with two great tears dimming the lovely eyes raised pathetically to his, that George, yielding to an irresistible temptation, suddenly bent down, and would have kissed the pearly drops away, when a sharp, stinging sensation almost stunned him.

The girl looked like a furious young goddess as she stood trembling with anger, her eyes like two burning stars, and the sensitive mouth quivering.

"For shame," she said in low, scornful tones—"how dare you—you are no gentleman."

Hurling these indignant words as a young

Amazon queen might throw a spear, the girl fled through the old apple orchard and was out of sight before George Standish had recovered his surprise.

"What a little fury," he thought, putting his hand to the still tingling cheek—"and who could have imagined that slim hand capable of dealing such a blow. I am in a hole now with a vengeance, and how I am to right myself is more than I know. What a little savage it is, yet what a beauty."

He waited for a few moments, hoping the girl might return, but no sound save the chirping of the birds as they picked daintily at the reddest and most tempting of the autumn fruit, disturbed the stillness. Already the sunshine was less brilliant, and long shadows announced that the day was drawing to a close. He must at least go and say good-bye to the hospitable hostess, so pulling himself together, George Standish made his way to the house.

Wide open stood the great hall door, but silence reigned supreme.

He turned into the prim-looking "parlour" on the left, where horse-hair stiffness was relieved only by the quantity of glowing leaves, and late autumn ferns and flowers, which Margaret's hands had arranged, but the room was empty.

No sign of life anywhere, save the fine Maltese cat lying curled up on the piazza just where the last sunlight of the fast dying day could fall upon her, and soothe her feline dreams. Perfect stillness and solitude. What a fool he had been to frighten away the cheery little companion who had made the long hours pass so quickly. Finally he decided to ring the house-bell, and see if any one would answer, which brilliant determination was rewarded by the speedy appearance of a neat handmaiden, who explained that Mrs. Gordon had driven over to farmer Cust's to sell some apples, and Miss Maggie she had seen not ten minutes before walking in the direction of the old mill.

Having obtained full particulars as to how this old mill was to be found, Lord George Standish proceeded in search of it, trusting to his acknowledged powers of fascination to make it all right with the little girl he had offended so frantically.

In a few minutes he found himself at one of the most picturesque spots he had ever seen. The old brown saw-mill stood beside a smooth sheet of water, where the crimson and golden foliage was reflected as in a Claude Lorraine glass. High banks covered with waving ferns were on either side of the tiny lake, and dark,

tall fir-trees shut in the whole, making a massive frame to the picture. The workmen had gone, and the busy wheel was still, but half-buried in a great heap of creamy shavings lay a little figure, sobbing like a frightened child.

The fashionable London Club man, hero of half the West End love scandals, smiled to find himself in such rural scenes with so simple a heroine, and for a few moments he watched in silence the childlike form and curly head, wondering within himself how such an unsophisticated young woman might be consoled. At last the sobs grew fainter and less frequent, and Lord George softly approached the little figure, saying in his gentlest tones,—

"If you will not forgive me, I can never forgive myself."

At sound of his voice she started up, and as far away from him as the narrow space in the mill would permit.

"No—I will *never* forgive you," she exclaimed. "*Never.*"

"Then you wish me always to be unhappy only because I was sorry for you?"

The tone in which he asked the question was so reproachful, so sad, that the girl seemed to hesitate a moment.

"Sorry for me, how were you sorry for me?"

"Why, you looked at me with your eyes full of tears, so I thought you must be unhappy, and I kissed you as I would have kissed my little sister."

"You mean you *tried* to kiss me," with a little tone of triumph. "If you had done it, I could never have forgiven you."

"But now you will, because I only wished to comfort you; say yes, and be friends again. Do you never wish to comfort people when they are unhappy?"

"But do people always *kiss* people to comfort them in England—I mean, does a gentleman kiss a lady for that?" this with scarlet blushes as she spoke.

The quaint way in which she put the question nearly proved fatal to George's gravity, but he saved himself in time, and argued the subject in so jesuitical a manner, that they were soon almost upon the old footing of a confidential friendship of a day.

"Shall you tell Mrs. Gordon about our little quarrel of this afternoon?" asked his lordship a trifle anxiously as Margaret suggested it was time to return, for her mother must be waiting tea for them.

"No—I think not—I will tell no one."

Very low and hesitating were the tones, as she

thus promised the first secret of her whole young life, which the adored mother was not to share.

In thinking over the events of the day the man of the world confessed himself puzzled. Here was a lovely girl to whom he had spoken without the all-necessary introduction prescribed by Mrs. Grundy—who had answered his questions frankly, and had also quite simply and naturally, without the slightest diffidence, proposed his applying to her mother for solution of his difficulties. Further, this mother had, without any excuses and merely upon his own introduction of himself as an Englishman, offered such hospitality as her house afforded, inviting him to share the meal just ready; still further, had allowed him a whole afternoon of undisturbed *tête-à-tête* with the lovely daughter, no thought of a chaperon having been suggested, and with it all even his worldly heart dimly appreciated the absolute simplicity of these two women, so unlike any he had ever before met. For an instant something akin to regret crossed his mind that he had attempted to judge them by his own worldly code.

"Surely I have stumbled upon Arcadia," thought the Duke of Babylon's son, with inward amusement. To this little white village, sheltered by the lovely New Hampshire hills,

the march of civilization seemed not yet to have come, since hospitality to a stranger was given without demanding "references," and a man was supposed to be worthy of trust because, forsooth, his appearance and manners bespoke him a gentleman!

Primitive indeed must be the worthy folks of Ashton, and many and varied the things not dreamed of in their philosophy.

CHAPTER III.

From the Hon'ble G. Egerton to Lord George Standish.

MOUNT WASHINGTON,
October 9th.

TIME's up, old fellow; in fact, as you may or may not have perceived, I have allowed you three days' grace, not, I beg to state, in order that you might pursue your Arcadian flirtation, of which I most distinctly disapprove, but from purely selfish motives. To be brief, I have been well amused here, and the place is really so beautiful that I shall regret leaving.

Both detestable and charming people are to be met at this mammoth hotel. The former I avoid, the latter cultivate, namely, a Professor Chandler from Cambridge, and his delightful wife, a Bostonian. Her native town she delights in calling the "Hub," which name is supposed to suggest that it is the centre of learning, intelligence, and all wisdom. I am trying to persuade these agreeable people to pay us a visit in England, and hope

I may succeed. Another individual has excited my interest immensely—no less a personage than the waiter who attends upon me at the table d'hôte. What a rum lot these Yankees are! Can you believe that the ambition of this man is to become a divine, or, as he expresses it, a "minister"? Poor, and of poor parents, he has for two years now worked as waiter in these mountain hotels during the summer months, that he may earn enough to pursue his studies in the winter. My friend the Professor has enlightened me upon the subject, and it seems the custom is quite a common one in these Eastern States. Moreover, the fellow is not bad-looking, and uncommonly clever, a bit of a Puritan I fancy, but with an amount of talent and strength of will which I predict must carry him far on the road to fame.

And now to business. Has Phyllis yielded, or is the siege still in progress? Do you forget that we are due in Canada in the course of the next few days, and bound for home the end of next month, or have you decided to give up diplomatic life, and settle in the secluded village of Ashton? Answer to Montreal, for I leave here to-morrow. You have missed some uncommonly fine scenery, and good company. Yours, G. E.

Lord George Standish to the Hon'ble G. Egerton.

Ashton, 12*th October*.

All right, old man. I do not envy you your fine scenery, and as for your theological waiter I am convinced he is an insupportable puritanical prig. This place is on the direct route to Montreal, so look out for me at the Windsor Hotel in that place before forty-eight hours have passed over your venerable head. Shall be quite ready to return on the 25th as agreed, and have engaged two charming passengers to help us pass the days on deck. Yours, George.

On this 12th of October, when Lord George Standish posted his answer to Mr. Egerton's letter received the night before, just six days had passed since his arrival in the prosaic and uninteresting village of Ashton, and yet not for one hour of the time had he found himself bored. Perhaps the situation being an entirely novel one, had much to do with this, although novelty may or may not be agreeable to a person, according to circumstances. In the midst of picturesque and romantic scenery, under sunny, smiling skies, the man found himself for long hours together alone with the most beautiful girl he had ever seen, to whom it was absolutely impossible to make love, in the usual acceptance of the word.

Now to make love to women had for many years past been the most serious occupation of George Standish's life, and he was universally acknowledged to be a proficient in the art; yet, notwithstanding his confidence in himself, he had never dared repeat the attempt made on that first day of his acquaintance with Miss Gordon, for which he had been so promptly chastised, and yet he could not help fancying that he had made long strides in gaining the affections of the fascinating New England girl.

Upon this particular morning the Englishman

strolled as usual up to the stone house on the hill, and, as upon every other morning since his arrival, found a cordial welcome from both mother and daughter, only in the latter he observed the very faintest change of manner, and felt, without knowing why, that she did not so wholly approve of him as she had done formerly.

The old orchard was the favourite resort of the young people in the sunny mornings—there they talked, or squabbled, or read, as the fancy of the hour might be, whilst good Mrs. Gordon was busy about a hundred household matters.

"Have I displeased your Highness in anything?" asked George after the first greetings were over, the impression growing upon him that Margaret was in some way offended.

"No, but you have *hurt* me," she answered, a trifle loftily. "You say we are your only friends in Ashton, yet every village gossip knows what we have not been told, that you are *not* Mr. Standish."

Had this scion of the ducal house of Babylon been a ticket-of-leave man, who under false pretences had introduced himself into the Gordon household, the child's tone could not have been more injured. His newly-discovered lordship was immensely amused.

"Is that all—I am so sorry. You see I

thought it much simpler to call myself Mr. Standish, and I am at a loss to understand how anybody has discovered my incognito."

"Why, at last it seems that one of those very important letters arrived" (this sarcastically), "and of course old Tompkins told that odious Grove, who is as good as a town-crier, or rather better, for the crier only tells what he is told to, and Grove adds a good deal from his own imagination."

"Capital! And now you see how wise I was not to give him occasion to tell anything. But it is hard lines you should like me less because I happen to have a handle to my name. Is your dislike to a 'lord' unchangeable?"

"I never saw one before," the girl answered drily, and still slightly on the defensive—"and—I did not think they would be like you."

Lord George's laughter at this sally was infectious, and as Margaret joined in his merriment the temporary cloud was dispersed, and the two friends again.

"But what must I call you now, as you are not Mr. Standish?"

"Go on calling me so, if you like, or, better still, make it 'George' *tout court.*"

"Jamais de la vie," exclaimed the girl gaily.

His lordship stood still and looked at her for a

moment in astonishment. "May I presume to ask where your Highness learned French?"

"With a Frenchwoman, monsieur," she replied merrily, "my only woman friend in the world, except mother. She was the wife of the Professor of French at Harvard College, Cambridge, and first her husband died, and then her only child, a girl just like me" (not possible, thought the Englishman). "She was very, very poor, and very sad, and her friends sent her to this place for change and some mountain air, until she could return to her relations in France. Mother saw her at the hotel, made her acquaintance, and brought her right home with her to this house. Mother always knows what to do for people in trouble, and Madame Duclerc was soon much better and a little happier, and then she taught me French because mother would not let her pay, and she stayed with us for nearly a year."

Margaret was almost breathless, so fast had she told the touching little history of the Frenchwoman, and when George asked where Madame Duclerc was at present, she was off again at once like a thorough chatterbox.

"Oh, now she is in Paris, where she has a pension, and she often writes and begs mother to come there and bring me, and, oh, if she only, only, *only* would!"

The slim hands were clasped tight in her excitement, and two beseeching eyes were turned to the Englishman as she said eagerly: "Do, do try and persuade mother to take me away from this dreadful place and let me see beautiful Paris! I know all about it, Madame Duclerc told me, and she lives in the Boulevard Malesherbes, not far from the Madeleine; if you will only beg mother to go, I—I will do *anything* for you!"

Rash little Margaret, but George Standish knew her too well now to take advantage of the hasty promise.

"Of course I will beg her to go," he answered promptly; "and I feel almost sure that she will. I have a capital plan; you must come over in the steamer with me and my friend, Mr. Egerton, on the 25th of this month; later, I also am going to Paris; I am appointed *attaché* to our embassy there."

A beautiful new world seemed to open out before Margaret Gordon as she listened to her new friend's descriptions of the delights of London and Paris. Her eyes, shining with excitement, sought his face, as with parted lips and flushing cheeks she heard accounts, wonderful as the Thousand and One Nights, of court balls and great country-houses, Paris theatres and beautiful picture-galleries, the charms of the Ladies'

Mile, and the operas where she should hear all the greatest singers in the world.

Then she urged that at once, that very instant, must he go and plead with the mother for all this happiness for her; not one moment must be lost.

Mrs. Gordon, in the midst of jam-pots and stewing fruit, was superintending the making of winter preserves, when without a word of warning two soft arms were thrown about her neck, and an eager little face with starry eyes and flushing cheeks pressed close against her own.

"Oh, mother, mother, do say yes!"

Lord George soon explained to the astonished woman the plans which he and her daughter had arranged, much to their own satisfaction, and was agreeably surprised to find that, on the whole, Mrs. Gordon thought very favourably of the change.

"My little girl is not very happy here, I am afraid," she said softly, stroking the while the curly head resting on her shoulder; "and our friend Madame Duclerc has many times urged our coming to her; but I confess the idea of the long voyage has rather alarmed me. However, with some one we knew on board the steamer it would not seem such an undertaking."

"And I promise to take good care of you both,

find comfortable lodgings in London, and escort you on your further journey. Surely, if I meet you in New York, and see you safely in charge of your friend in Paris, you cannot say you mind the journey on account of being alone," and George's most persuasive smile finished his sentence for him.

All business preliminaries were speedily settled; the house and farm were to be let, and there was ample time for personal arrangements between now and the 24th of the month, when it was arranged that George Standish was to meet the train from Boston on its arrival in New York, and escort Mrs. Gordon and her daughter to the Fifth Avenue Hotel, where they would pass the night before sailing.

"Then it is *au revoir* and not *adieu*," said the young Englishman cheerily at the station, as he was leaving for Montreal the next day, when both Margaret and her mother had come to see him off. When the train was fairly gone, the girl took her mother's arm and nestled closely to her,—"Mother, mother, it seems too good to be really true!"

"If it makes you happy, child, I am glad that we are going."

And this was all, but those two understood each other better than most women.

Late in the afternoon they were driving home in the old-fashioned buggy, having been to see Farmer Cust, who for some time had wished to have the stone house and farm attached, should Mrs. Gordon care to let it.

Margaret was driving, and it was well for the safety of her mother and herself that old Ned was the quietest and most sure-footed of beasts, for with her thoughts far across the sea, in new and magic worlds, the girl was hardly accountable for the management of the animal.

"And Reuben Hunt, child, what will he say to this foreign plan?"

The girl blushed, and for the first time in her life avoided her mother's eye.

Seven whole days had passed since those closely covered pages had come from Mount Washington, yet no answer to the letter had been written. Reuben Hunt seemed no longer to be the most prominent figure in her life; the remembrance of him had grown strangely dim, and his grave, kind words of advice, and exhortations to patience in the quiet, colourless life she so detested, irritated her—that is, when she thought of them at all—but the girl was startled to find how small a place either advice or adviser occupied in her mind at present.

CHAPTER IV.

Ever since Margaret could remember, Reuben Hunt had been her best friend and devoted attendant. When a little toddling child it was Reuben who brought the ripest cherries and biggest apples as offerings to the imperious baby beauty. Later, it was he who carried the books and slate from school, that they might not tire the tender little arms; Reuben still who taught her to manage the pony Squire Gordon had taken great pains to find for her; Reuben who fastened her skates in the cold winter afternoons, and rowed her out on the lake in the hot summer days; Reuben, always Reuben, and although Margaret was the veriest little tyrant, Reuben, very grave and quiet for his years, never for a moment swerved in his strict allegiance to her. Mrs. Gordon was well satisfied when the boy she had known and trusted so long, now grown to man's estate, confided to her that his dearest wish in life was to take care of Margaret for ever, and when he should have made sufficient money to complete his studies and become a minister, to claim her for his wife. No engagement existed between the two, yet to the young man struggling so bravely and honestly, Margaret was the present hope and future reward, and to

the girl herself Fate seemed to give her Reuben, and she indifferently accepted Fate without much thought upon the subject. *Had* accepted would perhaps be a more exact expression. Since the prospect of this entrancing new world had opened up to the girl's vivid imagination, all the narrow boundaries of her former life seemed to grow faint and distant, Reuben with the rest.

Thinking of these things, she had not answered the mother's question, and Mrs. Gordon did not press the subject. In perfect silence the two drove on in the darkening shadows of evening, and when old Ned of his own accord stopped before the door of the stone house, the stars were shining brightly.

* * * * * *

"What do you mean to do with that pretty child, George?" asked Granvill Egerton of his friend. Margaret Gordon had just gone below to look after her sea-sick mother, leaving the two Englishmen to smoke their cigars on the deck of the Cunard s.s. *Servia.*

"My good fellow, you speak as if I had purchased the girl in an Eastern bazaar, and were the arbiter of her fate."

"And so you are to a certain extent; and you most certainly have persuaded her away from a quiet and secluded Eastern home, where,

but for you, she would probably have lived and died, her hand in that of my theological waiter, Reuben Hunt. Not a particularly brilliant life, certainly, but a safe and tolerably happy one. I doubt if you can promise her as much."

"I should say, a good deal more; and when you talk of my having 'persuaded her away,' let me tell you that she has been wild to leave that hole for years."

"Only negatively so, however, and but for you would have been there yet."

"Then I say she ought to be uncommonly grateful to me; she will see the world and enjoy herself, be tremendously admired, and finally marry some lucky fellow, and be happy ever afterward, as say the story books."

"You mean to marry her then to some 'lucky fellow'—has it ever struck you that she, herself, might object, that, in fact, her dawning affections might be bestowed upon yourself, which *finale* I am bound to say you do everything in your power to bring about?"

An unpleasant smile lurked around George Standish's mouth, the least agreeable feature of his face, as he continued quietly caressing the long fair moustache which hid many similar expressions from his friends and admirers, and did not speak.

"The contest is hardly a fair one, George, all your varied experiences in the gentle science pitted against that child's absolute ignorance of the meaning of the word 'love.'"

"Why, 'that child,' as you call her, was very nearly engaged to the parson waiter you were so charitably interested in—"

"Yes, a boy and girl affair dating from her babyhood. I can easily believe the fellow cared for her, and in spite of your contempt for the means he adopted to gain money for his college expenses, that young man has talent and capabilities many an Oxford don might envy. That the little one cared for him is impossible; she would not have been so willing and anxious to come away if she had. Did he see her before they left?"

"I believe so—think he went to Ashton for a day, or something of the kind, but I have not asked much about him."

"Ah, I see, you do not encourage conversation upon the subject."

At this moment Lord George was called to join in a rubber of whist in the smoking-room, and his friend continued pacing the deck alone.

"Poor little girl, her fate is sealed, I fancy. The one commandment absolutely impossible for George to resist is the tenth. Odd, too, for a woman

not another man's wife is ordinarily no temptation to him; this Arcadian Idyl must have been a new experience, piquant from its originality, but he means it to end as all the rest have done."

So thinking, with pity, such as he would have felt for a wounded bird caught in a snare set by some wanton boy, had any such come across his path, the Honourable Granvill Egerton carelessly dismissed the new England girl from his mind.

> "What is life—what is death—
> What is false—what is true?"

So sings the poet, and how many hearts echo the puzzling questions to which so few find satisfactory answers! Why should one human being be allowed to enter the life of another, and for ever and ever blast and ruin that which might have been fair and peaceful? Why is a human heart so wilful and perverse that it will turn carelessly from those who would tenderly surround it with honest affection, trusty friendship, and loyal devotion, only to pour out passionately and unstintingly all the wealth and treasure of its whole being upon one who receives this precious fulness and completeness of love with a smile of gratified vanity, appreciating it not at all?

One hears of guardian angels appointed to

hover round each new soul as it is sent into the battle of life. Surely these sleep with leaden weights upon the eyes commissioned to watch over their earthly charges, or they could never allow the poor silly things to make the daily and hourly mistakes which pile up sorrows mountain high, to fall upon them and crush them at the last!

The voyage proved as delightful to Margaret as she had anticipated, and she revelled in the entire change, new sights, new faces, a thousand things too numerous to mention. She lived now, whereas before she had merely existed.

With the mental expansion correspondent to these novel experiences her beauty increased till it was startling even to her mother, so new a light of happiness dwelt in the eyes and wreathed the mouth with tender rippling smiles like those of a sleeping child. She and Egerton were fast friends, having formed a league offensive and defensive against the whole world, and the man who even to his intimate friends was apt to be cynical and sarcastic, found himself strangely gentle with this little girl whom he persisted in treating as a spoiled child. He teased her unmercifully sometimes about her odd manner of pronouncing words, and her peculiar Yankee intonations, but she showed no little spirit in

answering his attacks, and would often with mock humility ask to be enlightened upon the expressions *he* used, which she declared to be Greek to her.

"You stand chaff better than most of your countrymen," he said to her, finally. "A more sensitive, not to say touchy individual than your genuine American it is impossible to find."

"If you would only explain what 'chaff' is, I could appreciate the compliment better. Does not the Bible say something about gathering the wheat and the chaff together, and is it, perhaps, something good to eat?"

Amidst much laughter she was duly enlightened as to the prominent place the word "chaff" occupies in the English language, apart from its Biblical significance; a regular battle of words following, until both parties decided that a good deal was to be said for and against their national expressions, and a truce was proclaimed, with a promise of future mutual enlightenment.

Pleasantly enough passed the days until their arrival in London, where the usual November fog horrified the two accustomed to American sunshine, but made the Englishmen realize that they were actually at home again, no foreign land having disputed their country's right to the sticky, yellow composition, stifling to one's lungs,

and depressing to one's soul, known by the name of a London fog.

No native of Great Britain can ever understand why it is that a newly-arrived American is in breathless haste until Paris, the goal of all earthly desires, is reached. He may grow wiser in time, and come to recognize the many claims, historic, intellectual, and social, of the mighty capital, London, but it will always be after he has reached and revelled in the delights of Paris, not before.

Our travellers were no exception to the general rule; after two days in London they were ready and eager to continue their journey, for was not Paris at the end of it? So, escorted by Lord George Standish, they found themselves *en route* for that tempting place, having said good-bye with sincere regret to Mr. Egerton, whom they looked forward, however, to again meeting in the summer.

The very warmest welcome and most comfortable room in Madame Duclerc's house were awaiting Mrs. Gordon and her daughter, and at last Margaret's dream was fulfilled; she was in the beautiful Eden she had so longed to reach; the ambition of her dissatisfied little heart; the world-renowned city of pleasure—Paris.

CHAPTER V.

Christmas had come cold and bright, only wanting snow to make it resemble the same day in Margaret Gordon's old home. New Year's Day was passed with its wonderful presents, and the curious little *boutiques* blocking up the boulevards, crowded with beggars besieging the charitable, and emphatically cursing less tender-hearted pedestrians chary of sous; all this as different as possible from New Year's Day in the village across the sea; but to Margaret all alike was bliss, life seemed only pleasure, and no room was left for remembrance of the old days in the busy whirl of the new.

Galleries and shops, churches and theatres, each in turn claimed the morning and evening hours, and although diplomatic work and social claims occupied much of Lord George Standish's time, he still found it possible to be the escort of Mrs. Gordon and her daughter in many of these expeditions.

The American colony in Paris (that most marvellous institution) was more than usually gay this winter, and the secretaries and *attachés* of the various embassies and legations particularly affected its society. George Standish was the latest addition to the diplomatic staff, and apart

from his good looks and agreeable manners, brought with him the reputation and halo of being a delightfully wicked man, that open sesame to most female hearts in modern society. No one knew exactly what he had or had not done, but this slight veil of mystery only enhanced the charm. No social gathering was complete without him, and although engaged in hopeless squabbles amongst themselves, each separate element of the curious whole composing this same American colony had warmest welcome for the tall Englishman so fascinatingly immoral.

Being thoroughly at home now with the pretty, well-dressed women, all striving to outdo one another in expensive toilettes and lavish entertainments, he thought he might venture upon bringing Margaret Gordon to their notice, that she too might enjoy the dinners and dances, where she could not fail to be the loveliest where many were lovely.

It was the Saturday "At home" of Miss Langdon, one of the oldest social institutions of Paris-American society. A curious character was Miss Rita Langdon—a lady of a certain (or uncertain) age, very plain, not to say positively ugly. Affecting art, she adored artists, good, bad, and indifferent, if they were presentable, amiable men, who would make sketches of herself

in picturesque attitudes, in return for her teas and dinners.

Feared for a tongue as witty as it was malicious, she had more devoted friends of both sexes in consequence of its power than a kind-hearted and charitable woman could command under any circumstances; and being connected with the best families of every State in the Union, her circle of acquaintances was enormous, and her pretty apartment in the Champs Elysées the head centre of the *élite* of her country-people. New-comers who met with approval from Miss Rita Langdon stood a good chance of being warmly received, and pleasantly amused during their sojourn in the French capital; those, on the contrary, who had the misfortune to incur her displeasure or excite her jealousy, must become proof-hardened indeed to withstand the impertinent slights and petty social pin-pricks consequent upon her disapproval.

George Standish had gauged this woman's character, and seeing how powerful she might be as an enemy, with the charm no one knew better than himself how to employ, made her his staunch friend.

"Miss Langdon, you know everybody and everything, can you tell me about some compatriots of yours, a Mrs. and Miss Gordon? They

crossed in the steamer with us from America, and now I find that they are in Paris."

"Gordon—Gordon—I only know the Gordons of Philadelphia, who are distant cousins of mine, but I have never seen them, and do not know much about them. How many in the family, only mother and daughter you say—what are they like?—presentable—rich?—in mercy do not tell me I have any more impecunious relations or connections who have come abroad with the idea of economizing in Paris, and educating their offspring at the same time! Those are the sort of people who invariably spend all their money at the Bon Marché the first week they arrive, thinking everything marvellously cheap, simply because they will persist in counting a 'Louis' the French equivalent for a dollar."

Lord George laughed heartily at this description. "No, these people seem to be comfortable enough in the way of worldly goods, and are decidedly presentable. I think you would like them."

"If the girl is pretty and dresses well, and does not say 'guess' every five minutes, she would be an addition. The young married women monopolize everything this winter, and really we poor girls have no chance."

Thus to class herself with "the girls" was a common expression of Miss Langdon's, but the

Englishman invariably found it necessary to stroke that convenient moustache of his whenever she applied the juvenile expression to herself.

"Who is abusing married women?" plaintively asked a large, lazy-looking brunette, dressed somewhat like a paroquet. "You might let us have a little fun to make up for having a husband."

Now, Mrs. Wise's "fun" consisted in struggling with zeal worthy a better cause to keep three or four men at a time her devoted slaves, and *afficher* herself with them upon all possible occasions. Quantity, rather than quality, was her motto, and by dint of assiduously feeding her adorers, and providing them with places gratis for every theatrical or musical performance in Paris—further, by confiding to one the defections of the other, she afforded much amusement to the men, and provided occupation for herself. No one took her flirtations seriously, they were all such public property, and in flesh and colouring she was quite handsome enough to make the *rôle* of lover not at all an unpleasant one.

If any of the list would only take her seriously enough to quarrel about her, and be jealous, then indeed was madame radiant, and hasty summonses would be despatched to those still on friendly terms, to consult over the cruelty or

defection of the erring one. Society really owed Mrs. Wise many thanks, not only for her lavish hospitality, but for the endless entertainment these curiously open love affairs furnished, not only to the actors themselves, but to all whom they might or might not concern.

"Shall we let this stranger into our charmed circle, Belle, or are you afraid she may disturb some of your family, my dear?" asked Miss Langdon sweetly of her bosom friend, Mrs. Wise.

"*Afraid*, how unkind you are, Rita. I don't in the least know whom you are talking about, but I am not afraid of any one. If you had Minus for a husband you would soon learn to take care of yourself. Oh, my dear, *such* a scene last night, and only because he found Shirley sitting with me and bathing my poor head with cologne, when he came home from the theatre. It's one thing going to a hot theatre with your husband when you have a headache, and a different one staying quietly at home and having a friend console you!"

"Very different," said George Standish sympathetically; "but did not Mr. Wise appreciate the difference?"

"Why, no. He was furious, and made quite a scene. I do hope he means to go out to-night and leave me in peace and quiet."

"Let Wise come and dine with me this evening," laughed Lord George, "you can then be undisturbed."

"Oh, my dear Lord George, you always do exactly the right thing. Do ask him."

So saying, she sailed across the room, well pleased with the arrangement.

"Is that woman a born idiot, or does she only play the fool for the amusement of her friends," asked a clever-looking woman, a newcomer at Miss Langdon's, in a low voice, turning to Lord George Standish.

He laughed. "Oh, she's a very good sort when you understand her, awfully kind, do anything for a fellow, and all that sort of thing; she can't always keep her numerous admirers quite well in hand, but when they are particularly unmanageable some of us come to her assistance and put things straight for her."

"And why does she call her husband 'Minus,' is that his name?"

"No, not exactly; but you see, Mrs. Wise insists upon it that he is wanting in so many of the attributes she considers necessary to a husband, that one of her set, it has never transpired which, dubbed him 'Minus,' and Minus he will be until the end of time."

Never for many minutes did Miss Langdon

allow Lord George to be monopolized by any one save herself, so she returned to the subject of the Gordons, in order to claim his attention.

"Well, how am I to meet these worthy people you have discovered? I cannot deliberately go and see them, in case they happen not to be the Gordons I mean, and my cousins. Do tell them that it is the custom in Paris for strangers to call first, and make them leave cards here."

Now privately Lord George stood a trifle in awe of Mrs. Gordon's quiet, New England independence, and he had already experienced some difficulty in persuading her to leave cards at the American Legation, only inducing her eventually by carefully explaining that it was official etiquette. He was certain that nothing would tempt her to repeat the operation at the house of a private individual whom she did not know, but he did not propose enlightening Miss Langdon upon his intimate acquaintance with these "worthy people," as she sarcastically called them, so he hesitated for a moment, when suddenly a happy thought occurred to him.

"Of course you are going to the reception at your minister's on Thursday, I fancy they are safe to be there, why not be introduced then and see if you approve?"

"That's it, you have as usual suggested pre-

cisely the right thing, only, are they sure to be there? that is a question. Even if they have left cards at the legation, ten to one they will not see the one particular newspaper in which is the announcement that their country's representative will be 'At home' on a certain day."

"I should think they would be sure to see it, and it will be an easy way of making their acquaintance."

"All right, I will look out for them. Come and see the sketch Mr. Sanborn has just made of me; I want your opinion about it."

"I am afraid I must run away directly," Lord George said, following her into the studio. "I have to look up poor Minus, you know I promised to take him in charge to-night."

"Well, say a word to mamma before you go. There she is, sitting by herself in a corner;" and nodding a playfully youthful adieu to the Englishman, Miss Langdon turned to her other guests.

CHAPTER VI.

The introduction was successful. Miss Rita Langdon deigned to approve of the Gordons, although they did not come from that city of brotherly love, Philadelphia, nor yet could lay

claim to the distinction of being related to her. New Hampshire and its people were beyond her geographical ken, and Mrs. Gordon's quiet manner offered no invitation for minute inquiries. The girl was also lovely enough to make a sensation, and Miss Langdon adored a sensation when she was the promoter of it. For several Saturdays now the new beauty had been the prominent attraction of the "At homes" in the Champs Elysées, and upon each occasion Miss Langdon herself accompanied her guest to the door at parting, urging her in the most flattering manner not to forget her "tea" the following week. They were very pleasant, these afternoons, and the New Hampshire girl enjoyed them immensely, but more than once wondered to herself why it was that she seldom saw anything of Lord George upon these occasions. Either he was just leaving as the Gordons arrived, or as they said goodbye his tall form would appear, only just come. Even upon the few occasions when he was in the room at the same time as themselves, he would only shake hands with them and at once introduce some friend or countryman anxious to make the acquaintance of the lovely American.

About a month, however, after her introduction to society in Paris, during which time Margaret had been much admired, and made

many conquests, a sudden and almost absolute collapse came to the round of dinners and dances, so far as she was concerned. Her last appearance was at one of Miss Langdon's entertainments, a dinner, followed by a dance. Never before had the girl looked more beautiful. She was dressed entirely in white, one of those complicated, simple toilettes which are a triumph of artistic skill. A great bouquet of her name flowers, the gold-hearted Marguerites, a cluster of the same fastened at her waist, and a string of pearls around the white throat, were the only ornaments of her dress. The flowers were Lord George's gift, the first he had ever sent her, and upon this evening the Englishman himself no longer avoided Margaret, but on the contrary singled her out in the most marked manner, allowing his admiration and devotion to be apparent to all who cared to notice it. Only once did he dance with his hostess, afterward always with Miss Gordon, and when not dancing with her he talked to her, and to her alone. As is so often the case with extremely cautious, diplomatic people, a sudden fit of recklessness seemed to possess him, and the control which for months past he had exercised in regard to this girl changed to entire devotion to her, and neglect of all others.

Little cared Margaret herself, however, for any

consequences, or penalties to come. Were not the tormenting doubts of months past melted as frost in sunshine? Did not eyes, voice, manner, all tell her that he loved her?

They were alone in Miss Langdon's studio, a cosy, artistic little room, opening from the smaller *salon*. The softly shaded light fell on the girl's lovely face, glowing with new beauty under George Standish's ardent gaze, for what woman is there whose beauty is not increased by the knowledge that she is loved? From the ball-room beyond came the rhythm of one of Strauss' intoxicating waltzes, toned and mellowed by distance as it floated through the flower-scented air.

Margaret's eyes looked dark and dreamy as she listened to the pleading voice beside her, and one small hand lay unresistingly in the strong clasp of the man who for so long now had done his best to win her heart. Still lower and lower bent the handsome head, until the long blond moustache brushed her face, but she never moved.

"My darling," he whispered passionately, "you do care a little?"

The girl's cheeks were crimson, and she trembled as he kissed her, not once, but many times; still the slender fingers only closed gently

upon his, as the white lids fell over the dreamy eyes.

What cared Margaret Gordon that no promise to "come again" was asked as she said good-night to Miss Langdon? That lady's temper, never of the sweetest, had been tried beyond endurance: not only had Lord George neglected her, openly showing his preference for Miss Gordon, but her pet artist had supplied the proverbial "last straw" by requesting that young lady to sit to him, not merely for a sketch, but a full-length portrait for the Salon. This was the climax. Mrs. Gordon saw the change in their hostess, but to Margaret's brain two things only were absolutely clear. George Standish was going away for a week, and—he loved her.

So long as lasts the world nothing can take the place of such knowledge in the human heart.

To her mother the girl did not say anything. The charm were broken if put into words, for as yet words had played so small a part in this new and wondrous joy, it was all in looks, and tones, and above all those burning kisses which had been given and accepted almost in silence.

Did the child remember that once before when her acquaintance with this man was numbered by hours only he yet had possessed influence enough to draw from her a voluntary promise

"to tell no one"? and that the first secret of her life had, so to speak, been given into her keeping by him? No, she remembered nothing, and had she done so, the warning would have been unheeded.

There are some women whose hearts remain closed faster than the petals of an unopened rose, until "The King appears and claims his own" —when *all* is given, unstintingly, and without reserve. If the sun's rays have fallen too fiercely upon the closed bud, and the widely opened flower, heavy with perfume, falls before the day is done, is it more than a common law of nature? Who would think twice of the shower of creamy leaves left to wither and die, whilst the Sun-god smiles on other blossoms?

Margaret's whole heart was given unquestioningly to Lord George Standish, and she lived in an exalted state of feeling entirely unsuspected by her mother and by those around her. The week passed rapidly, and two or three letters which came from England were counted as priceless treasures by their recipient. They certainly answered the purpose of the writer.

After Lord George's return to Paris, he found more time than ever to devote to Mrs. Gordon and her daughter. Margaret scarcely missed the fickle compatriots who no longer sought them

for teas, dinners, and dances, nor did it seem strange to her that Lord George still accepted all these invitations, and was as before the general favourite of the réunions where Margaret herself no longer went. There was an utter absence of reckoning or bargaining in her love, no small change given for value received. And the man, like the Sun-god, called into life and beauty the closed bud, whilst smiling on other flowers—would the white leaves fall and die, even as the rose had withered?

Swiftly and silently winter glided away, giving place to the sweet spring days, nowhere more lovely than in Paris, and long mornings were spent by the Gordons and Lord George Standish in the *Allées* of the Bois de Boulogne, where the tender young foliage was rapidly becoming leafy shade, under which the dainty French *Bébés* played with their white-capped Bonnes, or watched with delight the gay cavalcades of horsemen, officers in their brilliant uniforms and wonderful women upon still more wonderfully prancing steeds.

The lengthening spring evenings found the three still together, that is, when his lordship's engagements permitted. Sometimes they glided along the waters of the Seine on the small pleasure steamers as far as St. Cloud, whence, after

a stroll through the shadowy park, and a cup of coffee at the *café*, they would walk back in the still starlight to noisy Paris. Or again, they would wander through the gardens of Versailles, where Marie Antoinette had in sport played dairymaid and shepherdess, and when listening to these stories of olden times, the American girl thanked fate for her happy, tranquil life, so different from the stormy days and tragic end of the ill-fated French queen.

If Mrs. Gordon's mother-heart built enchanted castles for her darling during these balmy days and starry nights, who can blame her? She saw at last that for weal or woe Margaret's love had gone out wholly and for ever to this strong, manly Englishman with the cheery voice and winning smile, yet with a delicacy not possessed by all mothers, she forbore to raise the veil which even her child's hands had as yet but shyly drawn aside, and she allowed no word or look to arouse the little one from her first love dream, which to the girl herself was still only a dream, too shadowy in its mystical brightness to take form or shape of the ordinary things of life.

But whilst Margaret dreamed, what was George Standish's object in winning for himself such a wealth of love? He simply had none, only in sheer idleness of the moment

amused himself with the society of a girl who interested him by her unlikeness to any other woman he had ever met. Her beauty was undoubted, and he worshipped beauty. Her manners were such an odd mixture of frankness and a certain proud dignity, that they piqued him, and pique was a sensation so rarely felt by his lordship that its novelty acted as a charm. This curious little Yankee girl had been affected not at all by the compliments and society love-making which in his world was current coin eagerly accepted, and he had been forced to try other means to secure her attention and win her friendship. All this possessed the attraction of difficulty, which to a man satiated with success comes as a blessed boon. Each of these complex motives had in turn influenced him, and as few women resisted Lord George Standish, when even in an ordinary way he cared to please, was it strange that with all his powers of fascination taxed to the utmost, Margaret Gordon should at last own him as her hero?

Enjoying the triumph of having conquered the affections of this proud little maiden, the Duke of Babylon's son basked cheerfully in the sunshine of the present, without one thought of what the future might bring, or, in the parlance of his kind, he "trusted to luck."

* * * * * *

The inhabitants of Madame Duclerc's household were a constant source of amusement to the American girl, who was prime favourite of each member in it, from the fat *concierge* and prim little *femme de chambre* down to the Admiral's stately widow rustling in crape and jet, and the courteous but silent Scotchman, sole representative of the sterner sex inhabiting the pension. The *concierge* was a strong Bonapartist, and Margaret had won his heart by bringing him little bouquets of violets, his dearly beloved imperial flower, upon which he could never bring his frugal soul to expend a sou. The Scotchman in turn laid floral offerings beside her place at the table, for which he could never bear to be thanked. He was an odd character, Mr. Burns-Murray, a grave, silent man, who gave no trouble, rarely spoke, and who wished only to be let alone. They had all in turn tried to draw him out; the admiral's widow; the young lady from Boston, who had come over quite alone, to study art in Paris; the two English sisters, sent by admiring parents to perfect their thin, piping voices under the best singing-masters France could afford; finally, the little Irish widow open to consolation—all tried, and all most signally failed. Margaret's existence was the only one of whom he seemed aware, and even to her he

rarely spoke. Mr. Burns-Murray's room was next to that of Mrs. Gordon and her daughter, and in descending the winding French staircase they were obliged to pass his door, which was always half-open and through which at any hour of day or night they could see him for ever busy over manuscript writing. Margaret declared that even in her dreams she heard the scratching of his pen.

Madame Duclerc's life was a very busy one, but for the old friends to whom she owed so much she made time in order to take them to odd sights, and out-of-the-way places little known to strangers, and under her clever guidance they saw much that foreigners often miss.

So soon as the portrait was finished, it had been decided that Margaret and her mother should go to London, where Lord George was to precede them by a few days, find them comfortable quarters for the season, and interest some of his influential friends in their social success.

With sincere regret did Margaret leave Paris, where she had known so much happiness; at the same time London held the being she loved most on earth, and in going to meet him she could not veil the happy light of expectation in her eyes, even when saying good-bye to the assembled

household at Madame Duclerc's. They had all come together to wish the American ladies *bon voyage,* Mr. Burns-Murray with the loveliest flowers to be found in the Marché of the Madeleine, the art student and musicians with gushing expressions of regret at their departure, Madame Duclerc herself with cordial assurances of the warm welcome always ready for them should they at any time return to Paris, and finally Jacques, the *concierge,* heartily wishing Mademoiselle *un bon mari!*

CHAPTER VII.

Five o'clock tea was an institution at Mrs. Thurloe's pretty *bijou* residence in Hans Place; pretty, and yet "too much so," if a rather ambiguous term may be pardoned, which exactly describes the lady's house. In the narrow hall there were too many *portières,* albeit of rarest Eastern stuffs, all lovely in themselves; in the drawing-room too many screens, although each corner divided by them was charmingly arranged; too many lounging chairs, each one more comfortable than the other; too much beautiful china, some of which was priceless.

We have a firm belief that the arrangement of

rooms must in some way reflect the characters of their occupants, and to the experienced eye this particular one would have at once classed the owner, without even a glimpse of her personally, as belonging to that third class of London women who are not *grandes dames* by virtue of rank and unassailable position, nor yet *grandes dames* who voluntarily waive a good deal of the dignity of rank, preferring the less restricting lines of pleasure, but a distinct inhabitant of that curious borderland where pleasure counts as first, where position by right of birth may or may not exist, but where rank often mingles with a half-contemptuous feeling that its own intrinsic worth is sufficient to allow it the amusement offered by these pretty, perfectly dressed women, who know all the men and many of the women in society; who are always to be met at official entertainments, and in the royal inclosure of fashionable racecourses; sometimes at the balls of the ladies who prefer the pleasant immunities of rank to its stricter dignities; rarely at the smaller réunions and dinners; and never at the houses of the first-mentioned ladies of position and rank combined, who allow no infringement of their order.

As George Standish entered this confusion of prettiness, he glanced around to assure himself that he was the first of the usual array of loungers

to be found at Mrs. Thurloe's about the hour of five, and congratulated himself upon the circumstance. He had but a few minutes to wait before the softest rustle of female drapery told him Mrs. Thurloe herself was beside him.

"George, I am so glad!"—and she held out two soft white hands glittering with valuable rings. "Where do you come from, dear boy?"

The caressing words sounded musically absurd coming from so fairy-like a being, and addressed to the tall, powerful man before her, but it was Mrs. Thurloe's "way."

She was dressed in some pale, creamy colour, fashioned into the favourite tea-gown form, emitting the most delicate suggestion of perfume from every fold. The small head was covered with short rings of curly hair, the cheeks flushed with almost too deep a bloom, the eyes faintly darkened by the most cunning art.

"Shall I say 'not at home' to all the world?" she asked with flattering inquiry; but Lord George rather hastily begged that she would not think of such a thing.

"I came early on purpose to find you alone before the crowd comes, I have only just arrived, and have a thousand things to do. What is the news?"

"Nothing of much interest. London is not

yet in a very up-and-doing state, but we are beginning to wake up a little, and there are a few good dances in prospect. Algy is very sorry for himself, because he put all his money on the wrong horse at Sandown, and Ethel is very savage because Lady Mexton did not ask her to a dance last week, but I declare I think she was right. Ethel has been really a little *too* reckless about the Viscount, so I don't wonder his wife snubbed her: but here she is in person" —as the footman announced "Mrs. Kilpatrick," upon which ensued an affectionate meeting between the two ladies, who never lost an opportunity of deploring each other's failings behind each other's backs.

"Lord George back in England!"—and a daintily gloved hand was put out in welcome by the new-comer.

"Do ring for tea, Fan, I am fainting from exhaustion. I spent the whole morning in the East End, at the Mission Chapel, serving out soup to dirty children until my own appetite was quite gone, and I could eat no luncheon, but a little of your particularly good tea will revive me."

"Lord George has been asking me for news and I tell him we have very little. It is too early in the season for any good scandals, and

there are no new people to amuse one, or, in fact, anything very exciting."

"Some 'new people,' as you call them, are coming over from Paris next week; some very agreeable Americans, a mother and daughter."

Her remark had given George Standish the opening he had been waiting for.

"Oh, a Yankee heiress! delightful. Poor Algy is sadly in want of one just now; you know he went a most awful cropper at Sandown. But perhaps Lord George has designs upon the heiress himself," and Mrs. Kilpatrick smiled rather maliciously at Mrs. Thurloe as she spoke.

"To begin with, the young lady is hardly an heiress, although very well off; and in the second place, I have no designs upon any one," answered George, secretly irritated, but determined not to lose his temper with these two pretty women, about the most dangerous pair in London.

"Oh, my dear, of course she's an heiress, it is what American girls are made for!" laughed Mrs. Thurloe. "So you mean to launch these delightful people, George; shall I give them a luncheon, or take them to the play, or have an evening at the House, and point out the celebrities to them?"—for Mr. Thurloe was an M.P. and his wife often honoured the terrace of the

House of Commons with her presence. "Mind you give poor Algy a chance, since you are not 'in it' yourself," and Mrs. Thurloe's pleasant voice had a warning note which was not unnoticed by either of her listeners.

"Lord d'Arcy—Colonel Burton," announced the footman.

"An American heiress!" exclaimed the latter, when the subject of conversation was explained to him. "Sure to be a beauty, George, if you indorse her. Bring them to the horse-show. I'll drive you all down to Alexandra Palace on the coach and give you luncheon."

Lord George soon after took his leave, and in the course of the afternoon at two or three well-known houses mentioned the approaching arrival of his American friends, obtaining more than one desirable invitation for them. He by no means intended Mrs. Thurloe to be the one to "bring them out," but he knew her too well not to be aware that to feel he had in some way appealed to her aid would flatter her into civility, whereas should she learn from outsiders of his having introduced a lovely stranger to the notice of London society, she not only possessed the power to make things disagreeable for the girl, but would not hesitate to use that power. His own married sister, Lady Hilda Brabazon, who

could justly be classed in the first rank of society-women of position, had good-naturedly promised to *lancer* the Americans, privately thinking a wealthy marriage with an amiable girl might be the best possible thing for her too charming brother.

Up to the day of Margaret's arrival, George Standish busied himself in arranging many points necessary to insure for her a successful season, and was sometimes puzzled at himself for the intense interest he took in her success.

Pleasant rooms were engaged in Clarges Street, and several cards of invitation awaited acceptance, whilst every moment seemed occupied so soon as Mrs. Gordon and her daughter found themselves in London. One of the first places to which Lord George took them was the Houses of Parliament, where exciting debates were expected. He had not claimed Mrs. Thurloe's offer, but had obtained, through the influence of his brother, who was a member, places in the small gallery belonging to the sergeant-at-arms, and facing the Speaker, where, although the lattice is still there, one has a rather better chance of seeing and hearing than in the crowded ladies' gallery, opposite.

It was a field day at St. Stephen's. A burning question stirred the souls of men, and aroused

partisan interest even in the female breast, where only dove-like harmonies of thought are supposed to fold their wings in peace. The Government and Conservative whips were worn out with the efforts made to collect alike over-fed Peers and fledgling statesmen, hungry for fame, from the remotest parts of the kingdom. Sporting politicians took an early train from Newmarket, to be in time for the division, and rural Lords, with misty ideas as to which lobby they were expected to vote in, were coached by anxious friends fearful lest the enemy should gain a vote.

The battle had already begun when George Standish and the American ladies arrived, and any one except Lord Randolph Churchill would long since have exhausted his vocabulary of adjectives; his supply, however, coming from some unknown and unfailing source, can never be counted upon—as exhausted.

A new Liberal member had attacked class privileges, expressing very extreme views upon the subject. The honourable gentleman had thought of standing for Tower Hamlets, one of the London boroughs, but that being out-and-out radical, its inhabitants had resented a speech made by its would-be representative, in which he had given a peculiar definition, and, to their

minds, too harsh a one, of a Lord as a Lord; in consequence of which it was politely intimated to Mr. Moreland that Tower Hamlets would none of him; but a more lenient constituency was found, which finally returned him. This tranquil place in the Midlands had been given its choice between Sir Reginald Bessemer Bessemer-Tompkins, the hereditary great man of the neighbourhood, and Mr. Ralph Moreland, and Middleboro' promptly chose the latter. Of Sir Reginald it had perhaps seen too much already, for even a little of the hereditary baronet was apt to go a long way. He was a blatant Conservative, if a term bordering upon coarseness may be applied to that aristocratic body. He was weak-kneed and weak-eyed, and the helpless way in which the round bit of glass through which he looked upon men and things dropped from the weak eyelid rather irritated the nerves of those brought into frequent contact with Sir Reginald Tompkins. He had one strong belief in life, and that was—Primroses. At home he dined at a table adorned with primroses, and abroad his buttonhole was decorated with primroses. Daily offerings of primroses were made to the bronze idols which filled every available niche in Sir Reginald's dwelling, these idols being in reality but one, for each bronze image represented the same

marked features, the same carefully twined curl upon the bronze foreheads.

Had Sir Reginald been asked to define conservatism, he would unhesitatingly have answered —Primroses; had he been requested to suggest a feasible method of rebuffing the ill-advised attacks of radicalism upon the hereditary rights of Peers, he would still have responded promptly —Primroses. In Sir Reginald's mind there was a large mixture of German mysticism with English practicality, and for some time now he had been haunted by the scene in a play he had once witnessed in Berlin. As Lord Beaconsfield was his political idol, so Goethe was his literary hero, and it was Goethe's Faust which now brought such tempting visions to his mind. Not the Faust of Gounod, with only Margaret and a spinning-wheel, and a rather uncertain tempered lover for its high lights. Poor Faust, by the way, much certainly should be forgiven him, with such an one as Mephistopheles for guide, philosopher, and friend! But the Faust seen by Sir Reginald had been the whole poem, angels and devils, witches and spirits, with all the fantastic horrors of the real Walpurgis night in addition. Four consecutive evenings had been employed in the representation of the story, and the Englishman had taken Goethe's original

Faust as his theatre text-book, and followed the poem word by word.

It was almost the last scene of the play which now came so vividly to his memory, mixing itself curiously with the great political question of the day. Faust's soul had been banished to that middle state of existence where there still remains a chance of his finally attaining Paradise, or descending still lower to the depths of hell. In a gloomy cavern a battle raged between devils clothed in black and scarlet, fiery with sulphur and brimstone, and airily clad, feather-winged angels, striving both for the possession of the man's soul.

The angels' mode of warfare was simple and poetical. Armed with large baskets of roses they threw the flowers at the demons, who retreated step by step as the scented petals struck their grimy faces, hideous with malignant hate. The angels advanced always, gracefully throwing their perfumed weapons, until at last the devils retreated in dismay, and to a triumphal chorus the celestial victors bore away Faust's rescued soul.

At the time, Sir Reginald had recognized in the angels the ballet girls of the theatre, in his present application of the scene he mentally asked pardon of the House of Lords for even

inadvertently and in thought connecting them in any way with a *corps de ballet.*

The Baronet had been defeated at the hustings —his hereditary rights scorned and overlooked in favour of a radical—what more than poetic justice it would be could his be the brain to suggest the means of rescuing the hereditary rights of the Peers from the demon of Radicalism! And to save them, too, by the one simple word—Primroses!

A picture of the Lords showering pale golden blossoms upon the demagogues who would rend all sacred traditions of the past, floated with delirious ecstacy before his mental vision, until the horrid thought obtruded itself that perhaps, unlike the devils in the play, these demons might not steadily retreat at each blow from the tender leaf of a flower; nay, more, with growing horror he saw the majestic form of the Right Honourable Joseph Chamberlain contemptuously scattering the feathery blossoms as they fell, and Sir Charles Dilke, with that hasty forward stride peculiar to the President of the Local Government Board, crushing the golden clusters ruthlessly beneath his feet. Sir Reginald was puzzled, and decided to ask advice from Lord Algernon Standish, George's brother, and member for Babylon, whose answer generally, to *any* problem propounded by

Sir Reginald as to whether he should or should not do a thing, was a reminder of *Punch's* inimitable advice contained in the one word, "Don't."

But this zealous Knight of the Primrose League has led us far away from the spot where George Standish with Mrs. Gordon and Margaret, were awaiting the result of the division, which time George employed in pointing out to the Americans the men passing and repassing whom he thought worthy of notice. There was Justin McCarthy, noting new features in "Our Own Times,"—the Poet Laureate, Lord Tennyson, wondering whether after all it is quite true that "Kind hearts are more than coronets," and Henry Labouchere, who paused, and for a moment raised his hand above his head. To the eyes of mortals it was not given to see the magic mirror of Truth which he flashed upon first one and then another of those around him, but with a well-satisfied expression the junior member for Northampton carefully covered the polished surface from which later he would be able to read the real motives, and carefully concealed intentions of those who fondly imagine their plans and projects to be buried in the secrecy of their own hearts, and the next issue of the popular society journal probably contained statements startling to some of its readers.

Margaret was amused and interested at all she saw, whilst names which had only been associated in her mind with ancient history, sounded oddly to her ear when given to men actually in the flesh, and within a few feet of her. From the House of Commons they returned to their lodgings to dress for a dinner which was followed by a ball, and at the conclusion of her first day in London, Margaret decided that life was surely worth living.

CHAPTER VIII.

In a bright, cosy boudoir, Lady Hilda Brabazon was having an animated discussion with her friend Mrs. Tremaine upon the subject of the Gordons, who had now been for nearly three weeks in London, and who had just been presented at Court by Lady Hilda.

"You cannot deny, Gladys, that the girl is lovely, and very clever."

"I don't wish to deny it, my dear; I think both mother and daughter are charming, my only wonder is that you, who are the most particular woman in London, and positively refuse to know such beings as Mrs. Thurloe and Mrs. Kilpatrick, whom after all one meets almost everywhere, will

yet receive, and even present, people you know nothing about."

"But I ask you again, how *is* one to know about Americans? There is nothing to do but accept them on their own merits. If it comes to that, we really know more about these Gordons than most of those who are presented. They come from New Hampshire, which is, I suppose, as good as New York. I believe both are states, or towns, I am not quite sure which, and George says they lived very comfortably in the country, not in the least as we do; but then I suppose their customs are different from ours. They have good manners, and are certainly well educated."

"I do not pretend to understand America in the least, but I believe there *is* some kind of difference between New York and other places. You know Charlie was there last year just before we were married, and he says it was a much smarter place altogether than any other part of the country; there were good carriages, with crests on them, and all that sort of thing."

"For the matter of that," interrupted Lady Hilda, laughing, "they have the animals in the ark itself to choose birds and beasts from, and mottoes are as plentiful as blackberries, so the crests do not affect me in the least, or alter any-

thing; and I return to my original opinion, that so long as they are nice and agreeable in themselves, and not fast or loud, it is all we can ask for. They never like each other, you know, and never know any good about each other, which rather makes me fancy they are all pretty much alike."

"If they were only Germans, or French, or Italians," continued Gladys Tremaine, still musingly, "we could so easily learn something about them; one knows all the names in those countries, and can look people up in the Almanach de Gotha, but Americans do not seem to have those sorts of books, and their ministers are no good, they are sometimes so odd themselves."

"Well, I like them, and I mean to be civil to them," announced Lady Hilda with great firmness. "One thing did amuse me, however, and that was that when Ralph Moreland was introduced to the girl she told him she entirely disapproved of his speech upon hereditary rights and class privileges: said she believed in the law of primogeniture, and trusted the aristocracy would remain as it is. There is true democracy for you! I believe I am far more of a liberal than she is."

"How amusing; but tell me, does Lord George intend to marry Miss Gordon?"

"I can't make him out," Lady Hilda replied. "He takes more trouble for her than he has ever done for any one, yet at the same time he does not seem to mind in the least introducing other men to her, even that odious Sir Reginald Bessemer-Tompkins. I begin to fear she has not money enough for George, yet I feel sure he likes her, as much as he admires her."

"Are they going to the Foreign Office to-night?"

"Yes, I asked for the cards myself. Mrs. Gordon, by George's advice, first wrote to their minister, whom they knew, and asked him to send them, for you know properly speaking foreigners' invitations to these particular entertainments ought to come through their embassies or legations, but he refused."

"I rather wonder at their sending ministers from the United States; one is constantly hear-of their mistakes, and they so seldom entertain, only go to other people's dinners. Shall you be there to-night?"

"No, there is always such a crowd. We are dining with the Temples, and go afterward to see Judic at the New Club."

"Oh, you extra exclusive! I confess I rather enjoy the Foreign Office, one sees such oddities there!"

"*Amusez vous bien, ma chère,* I detest a crush; but must you run away?"

"Yes, I have promised to lunch with Mrs. Osborne. Her new house is quite lovely. Will you ride to-morrow?"

"I think so, at twelve, or about that."

"Then I will meet you. Good-bye."

And pretty Gladys Tremaine left Lady Hilda to her interrupted correspondence. One note was to her brother:—

"Dear George,—We have a box for Covent Garden on Thursday, and I have asked Mrs. and Miss Gordon to dine, and go with us. Can you join us at seven o'clock?

"Affectionately,

"Hilda."

CHAPTER IX.

The morning after Mrs. Tremaine's conversation with Lady Hilda, as both ladies were riding in the park, they stopped for a moment at the rails, and asked Mr. Egerton to join the party for the Opera the following Thursday, which invitation being accepted, the inevitable eye-glass was being adjusted when Granvill Egerton dropped it suddenly, as he found himself face to face with the agreeable acquaintances made at Mount Washington.

"Mrs. Chandler, you in London, and I not know it! My dear Professor, I thought it was a promise that I should be the first to be informed of your arrival?"

"And so you are, my dear friend, the very first. We only arrived last night, and a note was despatched this morning to the address you gave me at your club."

"Mr. Egerton, how could you tell us you had no sunshine in England? I call the weather charming, and the number of pretty women astonishes me."

"Very good of you to admire our women, but one of your *compatriotes* is the beauty of the season, and she has turned all heads from Royalty down."

"Who is she?" asked Mrs. Chandler eagerly.

"I will give you three guesses," was the laughing reply, "because I am sure you know a great deal about her, although I do not think you have met."

"*I* know about her, who can it be? Not, no —impossible, and yet she is abroad with her mother. It surely cannot be the girl Reuben Hunt was engaged to?"

"Of course you have been made a confidante. I was certain of it, for you told me that ambitious young man intended going to Cambridge. Yes,

it is Reuben Hunt's friend, little Maggie Gordon, from the New Hampshire village, and I fear that excellent young man's chances are very slight. Does he still dream of making her a 'minister's wife?'"

"He still loves her, but he says there was no engagement, and he thinks her beauty must be as irresistible to others as it is to himself. Is she so very beautiful?"

"Yes, she is certainly lovely, and her manner charming as well, whilst the mother is a thoroughly kind-hearted, sensible woman, whose head does not seem to be turned by her daughter's success. She is a refreshing contrast to some of the mammas who have honoured us."

"I should like to know them."

"Would you, really? It will give me great pleasure to introduce you, but I scarcely liked to suggest it, for I have learned to be careful about Americans and their country people; they seem to have a natural antipathy to each other, and I fancy some whom this little girl has met have been anything but kind to her. I might have known, however, that you would be different."

"If only for young Hunt's sake we should like to meet her," added the Professor. "We grew much attached to the young fellow last winter—

let me see, did you not meet him at Mount Washington?"

"Of course he did," interrupted his wife; "first studied him as a social problem, and then admired his determination to succeed in the world, and if he had seen as much of him as we have during the past six months, would have decided that his admiration was not misplaced."

"He deserved to get on, for he was a plucky fellow, although his *modus operandi* was contrary to all our English notions."

"The Professor helped him a great deal in his studies, and was amazed at the rapidity of his progress. He is soon to enter the Church; can we not manage to keep his little love for him?"

"Ah, that, I fear, would be difficult," replied the Englishman; "but if any one could do it, I should think it would be you. And now what must we do to make you think well of my country, I want you really to enjoy your visit. By the way, where are you stopping?"

"At the Langham Hotel, some one on the steamer recommended it."

"Oh you dreadful Americans with your terrible affection for noisy barracks! But to be serious, do let me find you rooms in one of the smaller hotels, or take apartments, you will be much

more comfortable and accessible. Will you dine with me to-night at the Bristol, and go to a play afterward? in the meantime I can find out what is vacant in the way of rooms. London is tremendously crowded about this time of the year."

"But, my dear friend, we really cannot consent to give you all this trouble, you must have no end of engagements of your own."

"I have, as you say, no end of them, but most luckily not for to-day. The fact is, I should have been in the country, so find myself free from any appointments in town, which state of affairs I consider a special provision of Providence, as I can now devote my day to you. Speak of the angels, there is Miss Gordon, that girl in white with half a dozen 'mashers' around her—now give me your opinion."

"You are right, she is lovely," exclaimed Mrs. Chandler, enthusiastically. The Professor only smiled, and said—"Poor Reuben."

Whilst Mr. Egerton had been talking to the Chandlers, Miss Gordon and her mother, with Lady Hilda Brabazon, were sitting under the trees surrounded by a group of the best known men in London. Presently Lady Hilda moved to make a place beside her for a lady the Americans had not yet met, but to whom they were at once

presented. No one ever called Lady Hilton a beauty, yet Margaret thought she had never seen so sweet or so sympathetic a face, and the gentle repose and dignity of her manner at once attracted all who met her. There was something so fresh and pure and wholesome about her, so unlike many of the London society women. No one ever talked gossip or scandal before Lady Hilton, and, judging from her own conversation, it would seem that such things did not exist, yet she was pronounced to be one of the most agreeable women of her day. With her were two lovely children, a boy and a girl, who were fast friends with Margaret in a very short space of time, telling her of their ponies, and of the dogs and chickens and rabbits they had at Hilton, which they were obliged to leave behind them when they came to town. "Only Zip and Laddie came with us here," they explained with child-like eagerness.

"Zip is the greyhound, and Laddie the pug, but all the rest stop in the country, only they are so glad to see us when we get back, they all bark together!"

"Yes, all together," echoed little Muriel, who always repeated what her brother Carden said.

"You must not let those little people tire you, Miss Gordon, I am afraid they are almost too

sociable," said Lady Hilton, but Margaret answered that she was fond of children, which happened to be the truth, and not merely a polite society phrase.

When a short time afterward her ladyship carried the little ones away for their early dinner, she asked Mrs. Gordon if she would spare her Margaret the next day, when there was to be a meet of the Coaching Club, regretting that only one seat was left on her husband's drag, but promising to take good care of the girl if her mother would intrust her to her charge. Afterward Margaret learned that the Marquis of Hilton was one of the cleverest men in the Upper House, as well as one of the wealthiest noblemen in England. Just then Mr. Egerton came up and introduced the Gordons to their country people, Mr. and Mrs. Chandler, and they all walked on together.

An animated group surrounded Lady Frances Thesager's pony-carriage, drawn up at the favourite corner of the park, and as Mr. Egerton and his friends joined the beauty and her mother, one of the ladies of the party exclaimed in an irritated voice,—

"There, I told you it would be too late; you would not introduce those Gordons to me, and now they have walked away with Granvill Eger-

ton and some people I don't know, but who are clearly Americans also—how easily one can distinguish them. These cannot be very much in their own country, however, for they did not know the Gordons, I saw Mr. Egerton present them."

The speaker was a certain Mrs. Osborne, one of the most untiring entertainers in Mayfair, and the youth to whom she now spoke was the most useful dancing man of the day.

"Do not completely annihilate me," he replied languidly, "there will be plenty of chances, and it is too hot to hurry."

"My dear boy, you are the most insufferably lazy specimen, outside a ball-room, I have met. There comes Algy, I shall make him arrange it."

"What is Mrs. Osborne so excited about?" asked the owner of the pony-carriage.

"Oh, my dear thing, *such* a joke. It is all about her ball on Wednesday. H.R.H. has consented to come, and his list has been sent in headed by Miss Gordon's name. Poor Mrs. Osborne, who has put her foot down against these pirates of Americans, has to invite the Beauty, and she is frantic."

"Stupid woman, what does it matter? The girl is quite the most useful institution we have

had in England. I was 'out of it' altogether, had offended his Mightiness in some unaccountable way, and do my prettiest, nothing could bring me back into his good graces again. The invitations I most wished for became prominent by their absence, and I felt the horrible conviction that I should go as rapidly down the social ladder as one descends the staircase in a nightmare, and be as powerless to stop myself, when suddenly, for once in my life, I had an inspiration of genius. I was presented to the Beauty, *comblé'd* her with attentions, cried from the housetops that she was absolutely perfection, and that her platonic relations to Royalty were beautiful to behold, finally drove her about with me whenever I could find her disengaged, and able to honour so humble an individual as myself. Behold me pardoned and returned to the social sunshine; I go to the extra select dance at the New Club to-morrow night, and lunched with the Royalties at Sandown last Saturday, of course only in the suite of the lovely Yankee, *cela va sans dire,* but what does that matter? I am a born Jesuit, and believe that the end sanctifies the means."

Peals of laughter greeted this oration. Lady Frances Thesager was renowned for putting into words what a good many others thought,

but hesitated to mention openly, and in this, her latest, she had covered a good deal of ground.

"What *I* cannot comprehend, is why Mrs. Osborne does not stick to her principles, and positively refuse to invite these odious people inside her house. In my opinion, no American ought to be admitted into society. No one ever asks their ambassador about them, and yet they are received everywhere, if they happen to have a pretty face, or can tell a risky story with enough twang to show their nationality."

So spoke a noble Earl, pompous and prosperous, whose pet aversion was Americans.

"My dear Crofton, to begin with, they do not possess ambassadors, only ministers, and not unfrequently they would prefer not knowing these same ministers were they at home in their native land together, so one can hardly expect them to request these representatives to vouch for them abroad."

This was a long speech for Algy to make, and he felt proud of it.

Lord Crofton walked off in disgust, disdaining a reply.

"After all, who *are* these people?" asked Mrs. Osborne, appealing to every one present with pathetic earnestness. "Of course I mean

to ask them to my ball, because I wish it to be a success, but can no one tell me who they really are?"

"I can," promptly answered the languid youth called "Algy;" "they are the very oldest family in America, and the father is the leading lawyer in New York, too busy to come out here, because he is making pots of money for Beauty and the mamma to spend."

Mrs. Osborne looked relieved, but had no time to speak, for just then Colonel Burton, who was a tremendous social authority, strolled up.

"Talking of the Gordons, I suppose; what a duffer you are, Algy, to believe all that. The girl's paternal is the largest pork packer in Cincinnati, a beastly way of making money, because the smells are insupportable, but the coin is a sure thing, and as it is the old man who gets the perfume, I don't mind."

"You are neither of you right," triumphantly cried a *piquante* little blonde in a marvellously well-fitting, tailor-made costume—"the girl has no father, but when in the flesh he was a Methodist parson, whatever that may be, and they are not rich at all, and are awfully proper."

"Lady Charles, you are generally right, I acknowledge, but for once you must allow me to

contradict you, and at the same time all the other statements made about these Americans. My dear Mrs. Osborne, pray have no fear of inviting them to your select entertainments, I have heard upon the very best authority that the girl is niece of the President, her mother is his wife's sister, they have every right to be received by us all, and I am glad society has had the good sense to at once appreciate their position, and to treat them with the distinction which they deserve."

Sir Reginald Bessemer Bessemer-Tompkins having destroyed all theories prejudicial to the lovely stranger by this startling announcement, silence was secured for an instant, and then the chatter broke forth anew.

"Then that is why she was presented in the Diplomatic Circle, I could not understand before."

"Wrong again, Lady Charles," cried Lady Frances, gaily, "she has never been presented at all."

"My dear Lady Frances, it is *you* who are wrong, I saw her myself at the Queen's ball," announced Mrs. Osborne with calm triumph.

"But of course she was there, my dear thing; perhaps, like yourself, they wished the ball to be a success. Oh, can any one tell me why we were not all born Americans?" sighed her ladyship,

flecking the ponies' ears with her whip as she spoke. "We might then at least read the society papers in comfort, and not at every page dread to be reminded that our boasted ancestors were originally descended from kings' mistresses, and have cost the country untold sums of money, and that in truth we are a very poor lot, despite our pride of pedigree. And then, besides, we too might have been able to appear at her Majesty's balls without risking our lives by attending drawing-rooms when the thermometer is nowhere, in broad daylight, looking green, and fainting for want of food. Good-bye, Lady Charles, we meet to-night. Dear Mrs. Osborne, do not be nervous about the success of your ball, if you have decided to ask our transatlantic cousins."

With this Lady Frances and her ponies trotted off.

"What a malicious little devil it is," laughed Granvill Egerton, as he joined the group. "I venture to say that last shot was for Miss Gordon, was it not, Lady Charles?"

"Yes; you have missed a tremendous discussion about her; she has in turn been the daughter of a Methodist parson, a leading lawyer, a pork packer, and, finally, has become niece of the President. Who is she really when she is at

home, Granvill; did you meet her in America?"

"*Va pour le Président,*" exclaimed Mr. Egerton; "no, I never met her in her own country, but she came out in the steamer with us, and is a charming girl in every way; but it is two o'clock, and I have some one lunching with me, so must bid you good-morning."

In a few moments the rest of the party followed his example, and went their several ways to luncheon.

CHAPTER X.

Sir Reginald Bessemer Bessemer-Tompkins, whose political aspirations have already been described, had another aim and object in life which was perhaps even more dear to him than the hope to shine in the House of Commons, and this was to enter that Holy of Holies in London Society, the "Prince's set." He was tolerably good-looking, in spite of that little weakness about the knees, very rich and extremely conceited, and his amazement was great that as yet he had been unable to accomplish this object. He looked at those already possessing the sacred

entrée, and mentally comparing them with himself, as a rule, found himself the better man. He continued, however, carefully to imitate their manners and speech, which he was right in thinking rather different to those of other people. Carefully also did he note the appearance upon the scene of any new beauty, and the shortest possible space of time found the fair one occupying the box-seat of his well-appointed drag. Last, but not least, his dinners at the Bachelors' Club were pronounced perfect; yet, with all his pains, he felt only too surely that the coveted inner tabernacle held no place for him. But he was patient, remembering the old saying that "all things come to those who wait," which is true philosophy, always providing that nothing critical, such as sudden death or hopeless old age, happen also to come, whilst waiting.

To Sir Reginald, Fate had at last been kind. In some delightful manner he had, through the Gordons, penetrated to the very centre of the promised land; *how*, he himself scarcely knew, but the end so long desired was attained, and in thankfulness of spirit he forbore to demand of Fate what had been the ways and means. He was assiduous in his attentions to Miss Gordon when place was allowed him beside her, and he laid the flattering unction to his soul that his

attentions were not unappreciated. Could he but marry the Beauty, his reserved seat was secured; for he promised himself to be an indulgent husband where the reasons for so being were obvious. Sir Reginald saw in mental vision the lower and wearisome steps of the social ladder fast disappearing from view, so near the giddy heights had he approached in the dream dreamed under the glowing June sun, in the now deserted park. His mind was made up: he would offer for Miss Gordon's acceptance the "bloody hand," and his cold, calculating heart, before which, however, he would have a little light refreshment at the Club, as the luncheon hour was long past.

Sir Reginald's were not the only dreams this same June sunshine coloured with its own golden hues, only in those which filled Margaret Gordon's heart there were no worldly calculations to war with Love's luring pictures. Joy, contentment, ecstasy, were her daily portion. The one she adored was beside her again. Could life give greater bliss than the knowledge that he loved her?

If men could only realize how little is needed upon their part to keep a woman's love when once it is thoroughly and sincerely awakened, they would never lose it. Upon the principle

that did fleas but know the power of concentrated action they might rule the world, so a man, did he but comprehend the extraordinary toughness of Love's digestion, would never make the mistakes he does daily and hourly in his intercourse with women. Give to a woman but one infinitesimal grain of hope smaller than that seed which the Bible reckons as "less than all the seeds that be in the earth," and she will so tenderly guard and cherish the tiny germ that it becomes in very truth "greater than all herbs," and sweet-scented blossoms, and full-blown flowers glow and bloom for her, filling life with balmy fragrance and perfumed beauty. The man who has lightly and unthinkingly bestowed the original grain in the shape of a few careless, loving words, or some flattering attention forgotten almost as soon as paid, wonders to himself at the marvellous effect of the same, and, if a wise man, wonders in silence. But mark it well; this parable applies to either sex, and is in fact but a different rendering of the old French proverb, that there is always "l'un qui baise, et l'autre qui tend la joue."

The Hiltons generally left town rather early, going direct to one of their country places, not following the gay throng to Cowes, or later to

Homburg, which place during the last few years has been a little London, under German trees. This year they were to say good-bye to London gaities at the Whitsuntide recess, and had invited the Gordons to join a small party which was to assemble at Hilton for the Whitsuntide holidays. It was the Americans' first visit to an English country house, and as the great iron gates were opened by the lodge-keeper, and the visitors were driven along broad avenues, extending for miles through the beautiful park studded with magnificent trees in all the glory of their summer foliage, the smooth grass looking soft and velvety in its brilliant green, and hundreds of deer standing in graceful groups, or lying amongst the ferns, Margaret thought she had never seen anything so beautiful. So far as the eye could reach the afternoon sun threw long shadows upon the same velvety green, and glinted through the branches of grand old trees, and as they neared the stately castle, grey with age, having the family banner floating proudly from the ancient keep, to indicate the presence of the lord of the manor, the American girl for the first time realized what these noble homes of Old England really are.

Their host and hostess both advanced to meet them as they drove up, for the house party was

assembled on the lawn, where afternoon tea was prepared.

"Welcome to Hilton; you are our first American visitors," said the Marquis cheerily, and his wife, after assuring herself that they would prefer joining the party under the trees to going to their rooms, established them comfortably in low wicker chairs covered with bright cretonne, and offered the friendly tea, which in an English household might be called the equivalent of the bread and salt served by a Russian to his guest in token of hospitality.

The two children she had already seen in London at once claimed Margaret's attention, little Lord Carden, the son and heir, eagerly bringing to her notice not only Zip and Laddie, but two collies and a Mount St. Bernard, whilst tiny Lady Muriel Orme was as usual ready to echo all her brother said. Lady Hilda Brabazon welcomed them cordially, and Mr. Moreland, the young Liberal member whom Margaret had already met, and whose speech had given rise to the remarks which had so amused Lady Hilda in connection with the American girl, declared himself delighted at the chance now given him for converting her to his views. The new acquaintances to be made were a Mr. and Mrs. Monckton and Captain Dormer, Lady Hilton's brother.

Margaret had hoped when she caught sight of Lady Hilda that George Standish might also be amongst the guests, but his name was not mentioned.

The cool freshness of the country was delicious after the fever of excitement in which the girl had passed the last few months, and she experienced one of those pauses in life which a merciful fate allows now and then to the puzzled, overtaxed brains and tired bodies of mortals. One lives so fast in these days, it is little to be wondered at that mistakes are made and false steps taken, the only marvel being that they are not more numerous.

At dinner that night Mr. Moreland sat next to Miss Gordon, and succeeded in exciting her interest in English politics, which to him were life and breath. He carefully explained to her the difference between Conservatives and Liberals, and the man's own earnestness and thorough belief in his side of the question carried the weight which thoroughness and earnestness in any subject always do carry, but in this case love had been beforehand and left its tyrannical mark. George Standish belonged to the very class against which Mr. Moreland's principles were opposed; he enjoyed all these class privileges which she was now assured were the root of the

evil, and her intellect, which had keenly appreciated the discussion, upon many points deciding in favour of the justness of the Liberal party's views, was promptly silenced by the merest suggestion of the tyrant that she might in some way be disloyal to her love in accepting these new, strong doctrines. Nevertheless, the conversation had done her good; it was spirited and strong, and the girl was quite clever enough to appreciate it. Mr. Moreland believed firmly in a theory which some men scorn, namely, that women have it in their power to influence politics to a far greater degree than is generally acknowledged, and to aid and in many ways help politicians.

"You cannot think how much I owe to Lady Hilton," he said gratefully.

"But surely they are conservatives?"

"Yes, very strong ones, but not bigoted, and upon more than one occasion Lady Hilton has rendered me valuable assistance from the capacity she possesses of being able to see and appreciate both sides of a question, a gift, if you will pardon me for saying so, not always met with in your charming sex."

Margaret laughed; the remark applied so justly to herself at the actual moment, but then she was blinded and enslaved by love, and gloried in her slavery.

"Is not Lady Hilton a very superior person in every respect?"

"Don't, don't, I beg, use such an awful word in regard to her! She is one of those women who make the world better by their mere presence in it, who raises a man's respect for women because she is one, and who is never harsh in her judgments of other women; were there more like her, society would be a very different thing. I wonder if women will ever fully appreciate their power for good or evil in social life? They seem sadly unconscious, or wilfully blind to it just now. But I forget, you are a stranger, and cannot possibly appreciate the curious phases of the society of to-day; the subject is rather a hobby of mine, and there is no infliction so dreadful as a man's hobby, is there?"

"I think London society is the most delightful thing I have ever seen," replied Margaret enthusiastically. "Everyone is so kind and hospitable, and life seems to be one round of amusement and pleasure, yet at the same time the amusements are sensible. It seems to me quite perfect." Mr. Moreland looked at her and smiled. He took life very seriously himself, and the lovely face before him was so young, and innocent, and happy.

"I am afraid I have been using you very ill,

and talking of things stupid and uninteresting to you. I study social life to dissect it, and find out the causes of its weakness and moral sickness, and you enjoy it, knowing nothing about the weakness and illness; perhaps you get the best of it after all, certainly the pleasantest."

"Yes, it is very, very pleasant," assented Margaret, thinking of George Standish, and wondering if it was quite impossible that he should even yet join the agreeable party at Hilton.

In the evening they had some good music, both Lady Hilda and Mrs. Monckton playing well, and Lady Hilton singing as one rarely hears an amateur. Lord Hilton afterwards gave Margaret a lesson in billiards, prophesying that she would in time become a first-rate player, and the time passed quickly and pleasantly.

The next morning after the whole party was assembled in a great gallery, to Margaret's surprise a lower door opened, and long rows of servants entered, the housekeeper heading the line of women, the butler that of the men, and Lord Hilton read a short portion of Scripture, followed by two or three short prayers, after which the household filed out again in almost military order, while the Marchioness and her guests adjourned to a cheerful, sunny breakfast-room, opening out into a large conservatory.

It was Sunday, and Lord Hilton explained that they generally walked to church, as it was but a short distance from the castle, but the carriages were at the disposal of any who preferred driving. All, however, rejected the offer, and walked through an upper part of the castle grounds to the old ivy-covered church, where tablets, hundreds and hundreds of years old, recorded the names and ages of former lords of Hilton, and their "beloved wives" or "regretted" offspring. The old-fashioned square pews had remained untouched in this age of improved church architecture, and the one set apart for the Orme family was almost like the room of a house, with its cushioned corners and comfortable arm-chairs, arrangement for heating, table, and queer old boxes and receptacles for books. Lady Hilton's school children looked very quaint in their old-fashioned capes and poke bonnets, beneath which the rosy faces, as shining as health and soap could make them, were demure enough during the service, but seemed capable of plenty of mischief afterward. The schools at Hilton were the lady's pride, as the model cottages were her husband's, and after church the house party accompanied their hosts to one or two of the comfortable stone buildings, scrupulously clean, and beautified with gay flowers

and carefully tended vines, whilst kindly inquiries were made as to old Betty's rheumatism or John's bad leg, injured by a fall from some scaffolding, or Mary Lane's teething baby. It was not the intrusive curiosity too often shown by the proverbial parish visitor, which so offends the feelings of the poor, who *have* feelings, in spite of their poverty, but the sympathetic interest of one human being to another, and old Betty felt no hesitation in pouring all her woes into Lady Hilton's ear, great lady as was the one, and bedridden old cripple the other.

After luncheon, Mrs. Gordon elected to have a quiet nap, and Mr. Monckton had letters to write, but the rest of the party went for a ramble through the park, visiting the lake and miniature island, to which they were rowed or punted. A lovely place this island, and many a picnic luncheon was enjoyed there when the fishing in the summer time, or skating in the winter, made it a principal point of attraction. Two stately black swans sailed proudly about with arching necks, deigning, however, to eat the bits of bread and cake the children had brought for them. Then a visit was paid to the kennels, for Lord Hilton was M.F.H. and one of the keenest of sportsmen, whilst Lady Hilton rarely missed a meet during the hunting season. Even little

Lord Carden followed the hounds on his pony "Soda," looking very dear in his little scarlet coat and top-boots, whilst as to poor Muriel, it was the grief of her baby life that she was not yet big enough to do as her brother did.

"You ought to stop in England for the hunting, Miss Gordon; that is, if you care for riding."

"I am devoted to it; but do you think I could manage the jumping? I have never tried that?"

"Well, we must teach you. I am sure you would prove as apt a pupil at that as at billiards, and there is nothing like it, it is the sport of sports."

The next day was rainy, but the castle itself furnished occupation enough to prevent any regret for out-door amusements. It seemed to the little American girl that she was indeed in another world, when Lady Hilton took her to the very hall where, long years gone by, Queen Elizabeth in one of her royal progresses had danced with her favourite Leicester, upon whom later she bestowed the castle itself, in token of her royal regard; and the room where she had slept, in which was preserved under glass a curiously-worked table-cover, embroidered by the fair fingers of the maiden queen, while perhaps the too fascinating and ambitious earl himself wound

the silks then glowing with colour, now faded by time. In later years England's present sovereign had honoured with her presence this same room, where the great gilded bedstead was ornamented with the royal arms of England at its head, and those of the noble house of Orme at its feet, whilst the draperies were of heavy crimson damask and costly lace, and the walls were hung with pictures of members of the royal family, given by themselves as souvenirs of visits to Hilton. The picture gallery proper was filled with old family portraits, some almost faded away from age, others as fresh as though painted yesterday. There were stern-faced old warriors, and gay dandies of the court brave in laces and feathers, side by side with stately peeresses in coronation trains, their coronets reposing upon cushions beside them; others, again, dressed in clinging garments and large hats painted by Gainsborough's wonderful brush, or in the stiff gowns and long pointed waists of Sir Peter Lely's beauties, coming through a long list down to the present day when Millais had put upon canvas, with all his delicacy of touch and richness of colouring, Lady Hilton with the two children, and one of the collie dogs. The tiny, old-fashioned children delighted Margaret, with their stiff, impossible-looking dresses, and quaint little

caps; and she was deeply interested when told that some of the jewels worn by these beautiful women, dead and gone long ages since, had been given to an ancestor of the house of Orme by the hapless Mary Queen of Scots, just before her execution, when she herself took them from the neck about to be laid upon the block, and gave them as souvenirs to the nobles sent by Elizabeth to see her die.

The ambitious Leicester hung near to Warwick the King-maker, both ancestors of Lord Hilton, and Margaret felt that all these historical names had carried her far back in the annals of time, when the party left the picture gallery to visit the state bedrooms, and the bachelor "hutches," and the "ladies' corridor." But one thing was wanting: there was no ghost or haunted chamber to be found at Hilton, and when the American girl looked into Lady Hilton's sweet eyes, and heard the low, clear tones of her voice, she thought secretly that had one ever existed it must have been long since exorcised by the present chatelâine of the castle; nothing evil could show itself to that pure nature.

There were ruins to be visited, and neighbouring great houses to be seen, and lawn-tennis parties to be attended; so that the week slipped by before one knew it. The day before the

party was to break up, Lady Hilton and Mrs. Monckton found themselves alone in the pretty morning room, when the latter asked her hostess how she found her American guests.

"I like them both, the mother is quiet and ladylike, although not at all a clever woman, but the girl I find quite charming. Her ideas are so unconventional, yet she never offends one's taste in any way; but I trust it is not true that George Standish is attentive to her?"

"He seems to be devoted. I do not know whether there is really anything in it."

"Hilda spoke the other day as if she hoped it might come to something, and I have no doubt that for him it would be an excellent thing, but I fear he would make her miserable. I could not say much to Hilda about it, because naturally she is fond of her brother, but I shall be very sorry if this little girl fancies him. I think she has a nature capable of extreme devotion, and if she loved once, it would be for ever."

"She will have a hard life, then, if her choice of eternal affection has fallen upon Lord George!"

"I do hope Hilda will not encourage it. The girl is far too good for him."

Nothing further was said, for at this moment Lady Hilda herself entered the room, and the

next day the several guests went their various ways; the Moncktons to their own country place, Captain Dormer to rejoin his regiment at Windsor, and Mr. Moreland, Lady Hilda, and the Gordons, back to London and its feverish whirl. The rising politician to study up the social evils of the day, which were to work weal and woe for the young stranger whom he had endeavoured to instruct in their workings, whilst Lord and Lady Hilton themselves, in all the harmony and dignity of their happy lives, remained at the stately castle where the little children played upon the velvety turf under the shade of the ancient oaks.

CHAPTER XI.

Lord George Standish, when finding that Margaret was the favourite of the hour, found also that mixed emotions were excited in his breast by the discovery. Firmly determined not to marry her himself, he was yet irritated to a degree that many of his friends seemed prepared to prevent him from doing so. She had been

his "trouvaille" in the beginning, and surely he had the best right to her, but, alas! in this very fact lay all the difficulty. He knew that he had but to claim this right, and she was his.

When Royalty with its exasperating privileges threw aside his dances, and calmly appropriated the lady, George Standish swore to himself that he would propose to her the instant she was free from these flattering attentions: when Margaret's sweet eyes and lovely lips pleaded with him to remember it was not her fault if the dance promised to him had not been given: when he felt how positively she loved him to the exclusion of all others, his virtuous resolves vanished as at the touch of a magician's wand. As the smoke of his cigar slowly wreathed itself into airy, fantastic shapes, Lord George would carefully pass in review the different admirers of the American beauty—and as the smoke wreaths faded away, and the cigar end slowly burned itself out in the grate, his Lordship's mental decision was invariably the same:

"Yes, most distinctly Reginald Bessemer-Tompkins is the man. He is a born snob, and would sell his soul for an *entré* into the charmed circle: he is the very man; but the girl may be troublesome, and I hate a scene."

From sunshine to shadow in the fickle English

climate is but a step, and the glorious weather which had followed the Gordon's return from Hilton Castle was now cold and grey as November; all the light and warmth of June had given place to cheerless, leaden skies, and dreary sighing winds which were depressing to a degree. At the Duchess of Babylon's ball, which had been given the night before, Margaret had scored fresh triumphs, and conquered new admirers, but to her the crowning delight of the evening had been the dances with George Standish, who never before had so passionately told her of his love and devotion, his longing to call her his own for ever. Dreams the angels might have envied were flushing the lovely face even in sleep, while the cigar end burned slowly out in the grate, and the Duke of Babylon's second son decided that he hated scenes.

* * * * *

"Mother, dear, do you mind if we give up the fancy bazaar and Lady Frances Thesager's tea this afternoon and say 'not at home' to every one but Lord George? he said last night that he was coming to-day about four o'clock."

"Mind, child! if you only knew how your mother's old bones ache with these never-ceasing entertainments, you would also know that one quiet day is bliss to her."

"Poor mother, it is too bad; you shall not go to anything else if it tires you. I do not mind in the least giving it all up, and leaving London. Shall we go?"

"No, no, my darling, I like you to have all the pleasure you can, and I shall be as fresh as possible for the ball to-night, but I do not mind having a quiet day to myself as a change, and shall improve it by writing to Madame Duclerc. I have neglected her terribly, and have never yet answered her letter about poor Mr. Burns-Murray. She seemed to be very anxious about him, and from what she said I should think his brain was giving way."

"Too much writing," laughed Margaret. "How that old pen used to scratch, it positively made me nervous—but what a rain, mother, do look, it is coming down faster and faster."

It was indeed a pitiless, "weeping" rain, and as the hours dragged slowly by, and the drip, drip, drip on window, and roof, and street kept on unceasingly, Margaret found it even more trying to her nerves than Mr. Burns-Murray's pen. She was excited and restless, and first drew back the lace curtains that all possible light might come into the cosy sitting-room, then let them fall again that the miserable prospect from the dreary street might be carefully

shut out; finally, she put a match to the ready-laid fire that at least a cheery blaze might make things less forlorn, and then fearing the room might be too hot, opened the window, when, of course, the ever-dripping rain could be heard more distinctly.

That peculiarly irritating sound of cabs and hansoms, coming nearer and nearer, passing, and growing fainter and fainter in the distance, drove her nearly wild, as the moment approached when she eagerly listened for one to stop before their house. At last the right one came and did stop, she heard the welcome bang of the doors, the well-known knock and ring, and having been prepared for the last hour to receive George Standish, fled to her own room as she heard his step on the stairs, waiting until the visitor's name should be formally announced to her. Curious are the workings of the female mind.

Lord George's glance fell at once upon the cards for Lady Frances' tea, and the fancy bazaar, and his greeting was,—

"Don't say that you are going to those stupid entertainments this afternoon. I want you for once, all to myself."

"We are going to nothing until the ball at the German Embassy to-night, and I am at home

only to your lordship," this with a sweeping courtesy and saucy little smile.

He caught her in his arms and kissed her passionately.

"My darling, my darling, I believe I would marry you if it were possible!"

She scarcely heard the words, and comprehended them not at all, but was simply and absolutely happy in a quiet, dreamy way, as he sat beside her murmuring loving words, and softly kissing the closed white eyelids, or the sweet childlike mouth. But what could he mean—at last she was beginning to understand the strange words he spoke. The startled eyes were wide open now, and she listened intently.

"I cannot marry you, Margaret, but I believe I shall love you always. Oh, what a curse the want of money is—I hold it dishonourable to drag a woman into miserable poverty, and I could not answer for myself should money troubles come—under five thousand a year it is simple madness to try and live."

"Money, money," the girl said in a low confused voice, "I do not understand."

"My darling, but I must make you understand. I love you better than I do myself, therefore I will not make you miserable. There is no happiness in this world without plenty of money,

and so far from possessing any, I have only my debts and my pay, which by no means balance each other. Be a sensible little girl and marry one of these rich fellows who are dangling after you, the less you care for him the better, and then no woman can ever have had such a lover as I will be to you."

No pen could follow the wretched sophistries with which the man attempted to explain his curious ideas of life, whilst the girl's large pathetic eyes never lost their dumb, questioning look, and she listened as a sleep-walker does, to sounds the troubled brain tries in vain to understand.

"You believe me, my darling, when I say that it is because I love you so well, I tell you this?"

Margaret pressed her hands across the poor questioning eyes as though to shut out the handsome face and passionate glances of the man she loved, then, without a word, and before George Standish could speak, she looked at him only once again, and quickly and silently left the room.

"Mother, I think my heart is broken," with these words Margaret Gordon fainted at her mother's feet.

Did a demon take possession of the girl's soul

during that long silent trance when she was cold and dead to all outer life? Certainly Mrs. Gordon did not know her child, when in impatient opposition to all her loving entreaties she still persisted in being dressed and going to the ball; still less did she recognize the hard cynical tone of the fresh young voice and the mirthless laugh, as Margaret talked unceasingly about anything and everything

"Don't fuss, little mother, I never felt better in my life, and I must be beautiful to-night, I must look better than ever before, and you must give me my very prettiest dress, Parker, and arrange my hair as Auguste taught you in Paris. Look at the colour in my cheeks, mother, and then dare tell me I am ill," and laughing gaily, she kissed Mrs. Gordon's anxious, puzzled face.

"That's the brandy, miss," said the maid, Parker, reprovingly; "in my last place, the lady I lived with took it regular every night before she went out, to give her a colour and make her eyes bright; she became quite accustomed to it."

"Well, you see, Parker, I am not accustomed to it, and so the effect is doubly good; but if I could only faint every day, and be well dosed with the nasty stuff, I might get accustomed to

it also. Now, mother dear, you will positively frighten people if you look like that. You are not going to a funeral, only to the best ball of the season, and I mean to cut out every one to-night, and drive all these English women mad with jealousy. I will take all their princes, and the swells they are so devoted to, and I think I will even allow some one to propose to-night, the richest, the very richest of them all. Do you not know, mother, that the only thing in the world is money, the one only thing worth having? Did you love father when he had no money and was poor? Yes; then you were a stupid little mother, and ought to have known better. I used to think we had enough money, but now I wonder we can get along on such a miserable sum. You will see how *I* shall live when I am 'my Lady' with thousands and thousands a year. Go and dress, little mother, or I will go to the ball without you; they would only shrug their shoulders and say 'it is American!' and declare it was a clever, spirited thing to do, and be more civil to me than ever, that is, if Royalty continued devoted to me. Shall I go alone, little mother, or will you come too?"

The girl was indeed more beautiful than ever when she entered the ball-room that evening, and George Standish felt a fierce pang of jealousy at

seeing her waltzing with Sir Reginald Bessemer-Tompkins, and looking into his face with witching loveliness. Then Royalty claimed her, and it was some time before George could find any chance of speaking to her.

"You have kept some waltzes for me," he said eagerly, "our last dances for so long—"

"Too late, too late," she merrily replied, holding out her card filled up to the end.

"But these crosses, where there are no names, surely you have reserved these for me."

"Crosses, how very dense you are this evening, those are stars, my lord, and could I only draw I would make them sun and moon, and all the heavenly constellations to represent the mighty 'personage' whose name they stand for, something upon the principle of German theatres when they are acting Goethe's 'Faust;' not being allowed actually to personate the Lord of Heaven speaking with the angels, they arrange that when his voice is heard a sudden light appears, it is more respectful."

Her own voice rang with an undertone of pain it had never known before as she thus rattled recklessly on with an unnatural excitement of manner which entirely changed her, but to judge by the admiration expressed in high quarters, seemed merely to add to her charm.

She accomplished her charitable wish of driving the women wild with jealousy, which, however, they were too wise to show, and the night was one long triumph to the poor child whose heart ached to breaking with its wounded pride and insulted love.

"Have you quite forgotten that I return to Paris early to-morrow morning?" Lord George asked gloomily and with reproachful eyes.

"Yes, I had forgotten, and it was stupid of me, for I had no end of commissions all ready for you—*bon voyage,* if we do not meet again. I must not keep Sir Reginald waiting any longer for this dance," and with a gay smile, sadder than tears, she nodded *adieu* as she took the Baronet's arm.

He led her unresistingly from the crowded ball-room to the cool enclosed balcony with shaded light and perfumed air. For a moment she trembled, and closing her eyes, saw in imagination another dimly lit and flower-scented room, Miss Langdon's studio in Paris, and the burning flush which arose to her cheek at the remembrance of that first kiss, was interpreted by Sir Reginald as an encouraging sign of which he lost no time in taking advantage.

Could it be true? Had she in deed and in truth voluntarily promised to be this man's wife,

this man whom she scarcely knew, and who had not for a moment even interested her! What was he saying about coming to speak to her mother to-morrow, and how dared he—no, that she could not bear; he must not, should not, kiss her—and the music floated on in softened tones from the distant ball-room, the same Strauss waltz they had played in Paris. Was she dreaming, or going mad? Neither, only walking with her arm through Sir Reginald's, followed by meaning glances from those who noticed the Baronet's triumphant manner, and her dreamy, lovely face, pale now as Christmas roses.

"Kiss me, little mother, and say good-night, or rather good-morning. I am too tired to talk, but it was the best ball I have ever been to; and, mother dear, I have promised to marry Sir Reginald Bessemer-Tompkins. Ought I not to be very happy; he is tremendously rich, and money is the only thing in life worth having. Do I feel all right again? Why, of course, I do. Don't worry, mother dear, it is almost daylight, and I am going to sleep."

Sleep; no, anything but that. The girl shivered in the grey dawn as she buried the aching, throbbing head upon her pillow, moaning with the pain she need hide no longer.

"What have I done! Great God, what have I done! But he scorned me, he cared nothing for me, only money. He counted my love as nothing, and put it aside as the veriest trifle. He shall never know how my miserable broken heart is his, and must be his for ever. No one shall suspect that I cared for him, and that he counted me as nothing. I must be hard and worldly, and, above all, never, never must the mother know. I will force her to believe that I am happy. Oh, my love, my love, what have I done! No one in this world can ever love you as I do. What have I done that there is no love for me in return!"

With this wail on the poor white lips, and the scorching tears so long repressed filling the miserable, weary eyes, Margaret Gordon fell into restless, troubled dreams, where all seemed to be confusion and suffering. In the midst of the shadowy, unreal beings surrounding her, George Standish's face smiled at her mockingly as it seemed fading farther and farther away, and then she sank down, far down, into cold, foaming waves, from which Reuben Hunt stretched forth loving arms and clasped her to his faithful heart.

Mrs. Gordon certainly felt a good deal surprised, and not a little puzzled at this sudden

change of the principal actor in the drama of her child's life, but so strictly did Margaret keep to her resolution that "the mother should never know," and so clever were her laughing explanations of the state of affairs, that her mother decided if the girl was satisfied, it must be all right. Besides, in a worldly point of view, she could not help being conscious that this marriage was a great social triumph for her child. Those about her were careful to explain that a Baronet possessing the enormous wealth of Sir Reginald Bessemer-Tompkins, was a far better "match" than the younger son of a poor Duke, with hardly more to live upon than his pay as attaché. Moreover, that close friendship which had existed between mother and daughter while the two lived a life apart from others, and entirely to themselves in the quiet American village, had never been quite the same since the Englishman's all-powerful influence had come, to colour the girl's impressions and ideas of life. Devoted as she was to Margaret, Mrs Gordon's was not a sensitive nature, therefore she did not feel so keenly as another woman might have done the subtle and almost intangible change in her only child.

As to Sir Reginald, the absence of all warmth in the manner of his *fiancée* to himself did not

disturb him in the least. So far back as he could remember, if he wished for a thing, he had it; for many reasons he now wished for Margaret, and he intended that she should be his. He had an intense dislike to emotion of any kind, and in his dry pomposity was more difficult to move than a man of stone. Once only had there been a scene between the two, when in bitter self-reproach the girl had gone to him and told him frankly she had no love to give, begging for a release from her hasty promise, and praying him to give her back her freedom. None save themselves knew of this passionate outburst, but it was never either forgotten or forgiven by the narrow-minded Baronet, although he preferred to claim an unwilling bride rather than risk the ridicule of London society for being "thrown over" by the little American.

CHAPTER XII.

"News for you, Mrs. Chandler; your beautiful compatriot, Miss Gordon, has at last chosen from her numerous admirers, and is to be married almost directly to the richest Baronet in England."

"Oh, Mr. Egerton, I am so sorry. I hoped there was still a chance for Reuben."

"Too bad to destroy that little romance you cherished so fondly, but I fear you must give it up. And of all the men in London I should have thought this fellow the last she could have fancied. He is enormously rich, but conceited, and not at all good form; in fact, a thorough snob. Your sex will always remain a puzzle to me, Mrs. Chandler, they invariably do exactly the reverse of what one expects."

"I am *so* sorry for Reuben," was the lady's only answer.

"Well, my dear, no use in mourning over what cannot be helped," joined in the Professor; "the young lady probably knows what suits her better than we do, and Reuben is not the first man obliged to bear a disappointment. All that you can hope for now is that you may be honoured

with an invitation to the wedding," he continued, laughing, "when Mr. Egerton can point out to you the notabilities."

"Yes, we must arrange that, Royalty is sure to be there, and in consequence, Royalty's *entourage*. That all these latter shall be notabilities, I can hardly promise you, but you will at least see the fashionable favourites of the hour: their time of favour is generally limited, or in the parlance of the day they are 'taken up and dropped' with marvellous facility."

"Where will the wedding take place?"

"I have heard no particulars, but fancy Lady Frances Thesager is safe to give the nuptial tea, which seems to be the thing, and an improvement upon the old-fashioned wedding breakfast, as it saves the mournful exhibition of an Englishman's natural inability to speak in public. Lady Frances has made rather a good thing out of Miss Gordon by-the-way, and declares openly that her attentions to the Beauty have saved her from social eclipse, in which she is about right."

"Talk of American institutions, my dear Mr. Egerton, surely some of your English ways are a trifle puzzling to a stranger. To understand how little Maggie Gordon from New Hampshire can

influence the position of a great London lady, is, I confess, beyond me."

"No wonder you find it puzzling, but the construction of our social world at this moment is a trifle peculiar. Charming as your little country-woman is, and, much as I like her, I am often tempted to wonder what would be the feelings of some of these London social powers should they take it into their heads to cross the sea and have a glimpse of American society. They would never be able to find Miss Gordon at all, and I think I know enough of your country people to be safe in saying that even a Royal Highness could not, there, insure her appearance upon every occasion."

"You are quite right; I was surprised at her position here. Will you promise to point out all interesting characters if we are in London when the wedding comes off, that is, should we be invited?"

"Certainly; so soon as I hear any particulars of the entertainment you shall know them."

The marriage was to take place in three weeks, Sir Reginald being anxious for it to be celebrated before Cowes, Homburg, or Trouville had claimed the owners of the high-sounding names he intended to appear in the *Morning Post* as

assisting at the rite which was to give him the proud position of husband to the reigning favourite.

When the important day arrived that temple of Hymen, St. George's, Hanover Square, was crowded, and Mr. Egerton nobly redeemed his promise of pointing out to Mrs. Chandler the celebrities of fashionable life. Added to his racy sketches of their persons and peculiarities, the American visitor had full benefit of the conversation between two ladies sitting directly behind her, who kept up a running commentary upon the rapidly-arriving guests.

"Oh, Maud, do look at Mrs. Dean's gown, that woman always has the smartest and newest thing out. How does she manage it?"

"Not very difficult, I should think; they say Lord Merton is over four thousand pounds in debt for her already."

"There comes Lady Dalgairns, her first appearance since her divorce. The process seems to agree with her, I never saw her look so handsome."

"What became of that unlucky Sir Henry, is he still with the little actress?"

"I should say not, for it must be now very nearly a year since he bolted with her, and we know that he was never renowned for constancy."

"There is Algy, by all that is wonderful! I thought he was rather hard hit by the Beauty, how did he find courage to come to her wedding?"

"Do you know, I heard yesterday that Beauty herself was desperately in love with that delightful Lothario, George Standish."

"No—where did she meet him?"

"In Paris, last winter, so at least I was told, and he was mad about her."

"If he admired her before her marriage, we may look out for something exciting afterward, and really, Sir Reginald as a husband would be a legitimate excuse for a good deal; but what will Mrs. Hellard say if George Standish becomes Lady Bessemer-Tompkins' admirer?"

"Poor little woman, you know that man behaved like a brute to her, and I believe she is as devoted to him as ever."

"I thought at one time there was a chance of a reconciliation?"

"Oh, no, never. Captain Hellard turned her out of doors before George's return from Egypt. It was all that stupid letter of his, too, which did the mischief. For a diplomat he is certainly the most reckless being with pen and ink."

"There is Mrs. Kilpatrick. Do you know that she has taken to the fashionable excitement of 'slumming'?"

"Oh, no! that *is* a little strong."

"Strong enough to be true, I assure you, and the dear old Admiral, instead of handing her over to the tender mercies of Sir James Hannen, as he vowed he would not two weeks ago, declares to every one that she is a wife in ten thousand, and the one truly Christian woman in London."

"Oh, what a joke! And does the dainty Viscount go with her as natural protector, to these most interesting 'slums'?"

"Rather not. That young man was wise in his day and generation. If all the men who prefer other men's wives to their own had the sense to keep their heads in awkward situations as he did, there would be more repose for the husbands."

"By the way, this same 'slumming' promises to be the thing, since H.R.H. has been put on that poor Royal Commission. I wonder how long the pious enthusiasm will last?"

"Until the Prince is taken off again I should say, or until the hot weather has aggravated the smells."

"One would imagine the poor had just arrived upon the earth to be a pleasurable excitement for idle people to sentimentalize over, instead of

having lived and died and suffered long before royalty and fashion deigned to remember their existence."

"Here come the inseparables, Lady Hilda and Gladys Tremaine. What a distinguished-looking woman Lady Hilda is."

"But haughty as—frankly, I detest her, and can't find words to describe her."

"You do not know her, my dear thing," placidly answered Mrs. Montagu, "so you cannot describe her; but do you suppose this marriage has by chance been broken off at the last moment? I never waited so long for a bride before."

"Perhaps she has relinquished the baronet's tempting thousands, and eloped with George Standish."

"No danger, my dear. Trust George for never taking the responsibility of an unmarried female upon his shoulders. They must possess a husband to protect them, or tumble them into the Divorce Court, whichever may be the gentleman's particular line, before George steps upon the scene in a serious manner."

"Here she is at last. Heavens! the girl is as white as her dress, but she looks lovely."

"I call it the most miserable face I have ever

seen—perhaps the story about George is true, and the poor thing is unhappy."

"Fancy an American nobody having an earl's son to carry her train! Really we English are a very simple people after all."

"Hush, do—the service has begun. Eight bridesmaids, and not an American amongst them. I don't believe she knows any of her own country-people. Do you know they say royalty presented that diamond and sapphire bracelet?"

"Yes, pity she did not receive one of the inevitable Indian shawls, it only needed that to make the thing complete!"

"Pray be quiet, I want to hear how she answers."

Twenty minutes later the ceremony was over, and little Maggie Gordon from Ashton village walked down the aisle Lady Bessemer-Tompkins, wife of the richest baronet in England.

What would old Tom Morris have said of Squire Gordon's "folks" now, had it been possible for him to make one of that brilliant assemblage in the fashionable London church, filled with the fairest and noblest of the land, and honoured by the presence of royalty itself?

Verily the ways of Providence are inscrutable!

CHAPTER XIII.

Once more it is lovely June weather in London, and for nearly a year now had Lady Bessemer-Tompkins reigned without a rival in the most exclusive circles of society, during which time her life had been one endless whirl of fashionable excitement. She welcomed everything that could amuse or divert those troublesome thoughts which would come even in the gayest crowd or most brilliant assembly; and to drown all memory of the past, and live only from hour to hour, was the aim of her busily frivolous life. The mother, who always knew what to do for people, was far away, and could not help her in this vain struggle to forget, for Mrs. Gordon had decided to settle in England, that she might be near her daughter, and had gone to America in order to sell the house and farm at Ashton, and remove her modest capital to her new home.

The London season was at its height, and the Queen of Fashion, who had been a sovereign for so long, was learning a curious lesson of the mutability of human affairs, and the peculiar fickleness of royal favour. The judgment had gone forth from high

quarters that Lady Bessemer-Tompkins was not half so amusing as she had been formerly, and that the Baronet himself was an insufferable snob. A new attraction had arrived, fresh from the far West, with an undoubted fortune left by a defunct parent, who had been the largest hotel proprietor in the great city of Chicago, where hotels mean millions. The original manners and expressions of this Western damsel delighted English society; and secure in her golden dollars and Republican independence, she cared not at all for Old World ways and customs, and rode rough-shod over ideas and prejudices in a way which horrified many, but enchanted the select few.

As the new beauty progressed in fashionable favour, Margaret, who had become too civilized and like other people, found that she was no longer so very necessary to such women as Lady Frances Thesager, and the Mrs. Osborne whose ball could not be given without her; but her circle of acquaintances was so large, her social duties in the way of entertaining and being entertained occupied so much of her time, that she scarcely noticed how the Western heiress had usurped her place in their fickle affections. Moreover, she had found some real friends, where she had little dreamed of looking for them,

friends worth having. One of the women who had discussed the company at Margaret's wedding, she who had declared there never had been a more miserable face than that of the bride, she it was, a certain Mrs. Montagu, who stood true and staunch to Lady Bessemer-Tompkins when others fell away.

Fully convinced in her own heart that her theory was true, and that George Standish was the cause of the girl's unhappiness, she stoutly disavowed to all others any possibility of such being the case, and in every way shielded Margaret so long as she was able.

Lady Hilda Brabazon had not been fickle towards her American friend, but had seen far less of her since her marriage, for the reason that she cordially detested Sir Reginald, and also because upon more than one occasion she had been much shocked at hearing Lady Tompkins' name mentioned with her brother's in a way she entirely disapproved of.

Lord George had arranged that this year his leave of absence should come during the height of the season, and for two weeks now he had been in London, Lady Bessemer-Tompkins' constant attendant.

Many who had envied Margaret her success

in society, now saw a chance of hastening the catastrophe which generally followed George Standish's attentions to a woman, and petty social slights began to be shown by the very women who had outvied one another in civilities to the favourite. Slights so small that Margaret herself, engrossed with the fierce conflict going on in her own heart, never even noticed them; but Sir Reginald grew moody and indignant when he at last perceived that the presence of his beautiful wife was no longer considered necessary at the best balls, and he was also furious that as yet no sign had appeared of the heir who was to hand down to posterity the noble name of Bessemer-Tompkins.

His wife, whom until now he had humoured in every wish and fancy, began to perceive the real character of the man she had so rashly married, yet seemed unable to perceive how greatly she herself was to blame for the daily widening of the breach between them, and things went on from bad to worse, neither husband nor wife seeming inclined to make any effort at reconciliation.

Tempest-tossed and storm-driven was the woman's soul; bitter her cry against Fate, more bitter still her scorn against herself for what she

had done deliberately and of her own free-will, yet never a thought of reproach had she against the real and only cause of all her woes.

Mr. Egerton was right in saying what many have said before, that the female sex is a puzzle past finding out.

On a certain evening, about the middle of the season, the moody Baronet had elected to look in at his club, the Bessemer-Tompkins' names not having been included in the list of some particularly *recherché* ball to be given that night. To Margaret, weary of all the rush and whirl of gaiety where she must smile with an aching heart, in which *fear of herself* had taken miserable possession, it was no misfortune to have been forgotten, rather a relief. She was now constantly thrown in the society of the man she had never ceased to love, and secure in the fact that she was now a married woman, George spared no effort to win her for himself.

It was the old story, to which the old ending was bound to come, for George Standish was merciless, and she loved him.

At the club two men sauntered in for a few minutes, and discussed rather freely Lady Bessemer-Tompkins and her affairs, without per-

ceiving the lady's husband, who had the full benefit of their conversation.

In a rage he returned to his house, meaning then and there to accuse his wife of everything, but her ladyship had not returned from the opera, and his fury having time to cool, he determined to watch quietly for a few days, and find more convincing proof than a careless conversation overheard at a club.

The next day was Sunday, and when breakfasting alone in her boudoir, the maid brought Lady Tompkins a tray full of notes and letters which had come the evening before. Amongst them was a long home-letter from Mrs. Gordon, which Margaret eagerly opened. Almost the entire letter was about Reuben Hunt, whose health having given way under constant study, overwork, and the cares of a large parish, had gone abroad in one of the French steamers, and was probably already in Paris.

Reuben Hunt! How the name carried her back into the past, and how peaceful seemed the tiny northern village with its white houses and the brick store. How distinctly she could see the large building with "Normal School" written over the entrance, where her early triumphs and honours were won under the admiring eyes of

the fond old father, rough Squire Jim. And the quiet churchyard, with the glorious sunset just gilding his huge monument, the dark pines so tall and straight, rearing their proud heads against the misty purple hills. Had she, Lady Bessemer-Tompkins, an acknowledged beauty of London society, once been little Maggie Gordon, for whom the hardy old farmers always had a cheery word, and with whom Reuben Hunt skated in the clear frosty days in New Hampshire? How much had happened since those childish days, and how old and tired she felt. Surely a whole lifetime had gone by, yet she was barely twenty. Reuben Hunt had loved her, even as she had loved another; had he, too, suffered as she had? For the first time the woman realized that this might be, and a great pity filled her heart, almost as much for him as for herself; and her husband—could he, perchance, have suffered too? How selfish she had been, and how blind! That very instant would she go to him, asking forgiveness for having married him!—and Margaret's hand was actually on the bell, when a sudden thought stopped her. Precise and formal, Sir Reginald, of all things, disliked anything impulsive, or in the least degree out of the ordinary way. He would have all

things done decently and in order, no shocks or surprises in life, and the impulsiveness of his wife's character was a very thorn in his flesh. No—she must wait. It was now nearly twelve o'clock—the baronet would go to the park at once, lunching afterward, as he always did on Sundays, with his mother, the dowager. After that he paid visits, and it would not be until between five and six, perhaps even later, that she could see him. Stay—between five and six—had she not promised to be at home then, and to Lord George Standish? The wan cheek, always pale now, flushed hotly. No, not to-day. She mistrusted herself so horribly, she was so terribly alone. Why had her mother left her—and Reuben, who always took care of her? But he was ill, and she had made him unhappy, just as another had made her. Was all this misery *Love?* That rosy, laughing little god to whom poets give their sweetest songs, and painters their most glowing tints? What a cruel farce it all was, and how much evil had this same Love brought to her and hers.

There was time even yet, however; and with all her heart and soul would she strive to repair that which only now did she fully realize. For Reuben it was too late; but her husband—she had wronged him in marrying him, when that one

love of her life filled her whole being. But as the world counts wrong, she was guiltless, and her future should be spent in crushing out the love which was sin, and striving so far as in her lay to promote the happiness of the man whose name and position and wealth she had accepted.

Never again, willingly, would she see George Standish; but, oh! for some strength, some help for these resolutions so hard to keep!

Margaret had not often occupied the stiff family pew in her husband's parish church, and was wont to say that she could not command attention and feel good at stated hours. Had foreign customs prevailed in England, the girl would more than once have raised a heavy leathern curtain, and entering some dim quiet aisle, have sought rest from the fierce battle of social life, and help to quell the rebellious spirit beating against its gilded bars; but even Westminster Abbey, a favourite retreat of the fashionable beauty, was closed, save at certain hours.

The breakfast was almost untasted, and the letters and notes lay still unopened, when Lady Tompkins rang for her maid.

"Order the brougham at a quarter to three, Parker, and tell James to say 'not at home' this afternoon."

"Yes, my lady."

* * * * * *

The brilliant summer sunshine came in softened shades through the stained-glass windows, making long lines of light in the solemn, shadowy aisles, and under the fretted archways of the old stone Abbey, one of the most beautiful cathedrals in the whole world. The Dean was absent, and a stranger occupied the pulpit, near which Margaret knelt, listening with bowed head to the grave, earnest tones, pleading with this vast multitude of people, to whom he was unknown, for the souls which must live for ever in bliss and joy passing all mortal ken, or in agony and torture of which the mind of man can form not even an idea.

At last he pronounced the blessing, imploring that "peace which passeth all understanding" for her world-tossed, tired heart; and the slender, girlish figure knelt on with bowed head as the vast crowd left the sacred building and the solemn tones of the organ floated through the aisles and died away. All was now still, and Margaret started as the verger touched her, saying the Abbey was to be closed. Drawing the thick veil still closer, to hide the tear-stained face, she entered her carriage, telling the man to drive on, anywhere, for an hour or two.

Lord George Standish had said that he would call in Grosvenor Square that afternoon, and was much astonished to find Lady Bessemer-Tompkins "not at home." Later he returned a second time, but the same answer greeted him. Upon this he hastened to his club, and wrote the following note:—

"My darling,—I cannot have offended you, and yet you promised to be at home this afternoon. I have called twice, but always the same answer. I *must* see you before we meet at dinner to-night. London society is dangerous, and we must be more prudent; but should all the world desert you, one heart is yours for ever, as it has been ever since our first meeting in the little American village, so long ago. By the memory of the lovely autumn days there, and those happy months in Paris, I beseech you to believe and trust in the devotion of yours only,

"George Standish."

Such was the missive handed to Sir Reginald Tompkins by a club messenger, just as the baronet was leaving his own house. No servant being near, he took the note himself, immediately recognizing the handwriting.

"The gentleman said it was important, and must be delivered directly, sir."

"All right, my man; I will see to it."

Opening the door, the baronet entered his

library, and deliberately, without one moment's hesitation, broke the seal, and read George Standish's letter to his wife.

* * * * * *

Burning with enthusiasm, and eager at once to put her good resolutions into practice, Margaret's first question upon reaching her husband's house was whether Sir Reginald was at home. The answer was in the negative; so going to her room at once, she dressed hastily, lest the baronet might return before she was ready, and then went down to the small drawing-room, the prettiest room in the house. Although money was apparent everywhere, in the costly trifles filling every space, yet artistic taste had fortunately triumphed in the decorations, and the surroundings were worthy the lovely woman who stood there, loveliest object of all. She wore a tea gown of old-gold coloured plush, falling in soft clinging folds around the slender form, and showing lights and shades with every motion. Filmy lace, with the glistening sheen of old-gold coloured satin showing here and there through the delicate tracery, veiled the entire front of the dress, and was fastened at her throat by a superb diamond crescent, flashing and burning with a thousand rays at each turn of the shapely head, which from time to time was

bent in a listening attitude. In her haste Margaret had forgotten the glittering rings she generally wore, and only the plain gold circlet, emblem of her marriage vows, adorned her hand. Just above where she stood in all the glory of the western sunlight, which deepened the tints of the old gold, and brought new flames to the diamonds at her throat, hung the Paris portrait, painted at the time when life was so rich in bliss and love that the little American maiden did not envy even the glories of a French queen.

Very young, and sweet, and winsome looked the fair child with starry eyes gazing fearlessly into the future. Her dress was purest white, its only jewel innocence, and the little hands lovingly held a few white marguerites, her name flowers. In the flushed and beautiful face below the picture there was a likeness, but still more a change, for the clear light in the child's eyes had burned to scorching fever heat in those of the listening woman, and the tender, smiling mouth showed lines of suffering and sorrow.

"Sir Reginald has returned, my lady, and asked for your ladyship."

"Tell Sir Reginald that I am here—and you need not bring tea until I ring."

The tall footman seldom troubled his well-

powdered head about anything in life, but that both his master and mistress should have eagerly asked after each other, was too much for his philosophy, and to his friend the hall porter he communicated the startling information "that something was surely up," to which the lugubrious Mr. Jenkins unhesitatingly assented.

Sir Reginald entered his wife's drawing-room more rigid and pompous than ever, but a dangerous light was in his cold, steely eyes, as he carefully closed the door and came towards her.

"Your ladyship did me the honour of sending for me—"

Margaret started at the curious tone, the more than usual stiffness of her husband's manner.

"Yes—I have wanted to see you all day, Reginald—I am so, so sorry"—she came closer, and the lovely eyes were raised imploringly to the man's pitiless face, but he silently motioned her away.

"I am so sorry, Reginald, and all these months I have been so blind and selfish, I have thought only of myself; but now I know other people can suffer too, and I will try so hard to make up to you for having married me. Will you forgive me, and let me try and make you happy?"

This appeal was so naïve in its simplicity, so

audacious by the light of the baronet's reading, with the club conversation still ringing in his ears, and the accusing letter from Lord George Standish actually in his possession, that the man was silent from sheer amazement, whilst a wild hope darted through Margaret's brain that he had already forgiven the misunderstandings and miseries which had rendered their lives wretched, and would help her in this happy new life which she meant so honestly to try and lead.

"Can we not go away together, Reginald, and then alone, with none of this rush and whirl of society, perhaps I can make you happy—will you try?"

At last his concentrated fury found words, and with scathing sarcasm he taunted the trembling girl before him with every wrong a woman can commit, concluding with scornfully asking why she had shown so little wit as publicly to go to Lord George Standish's rooms that very day.

Margaret indignantly denied the charge.

"You lie, madam," exclaimed the infuriated baronet. "For one whole hour *my* horses and *my* liveries were seen waiting within a few paces of that man's door. I repeat it, you deliberately lie!"

Margaret started as though his hand had struck her.

"Pray God you may be mad," she said in awed tones, gazing with wide, solemn eyes at her husband's passion-distorted face, "for I will not believe you cruelly wicked. You must trust me, Reginald: I have never told a lie in my life. This afternoon I went to Westminster Abbey, and ordered the carriage to wait. I suppose the coachman chose to do so in the shade of Victoria Street. I have not seen Lord George Standish to-day."

"Of the fact that you did not see him, I have proof; that you went hoping to find him, I am equally certain. Read that, and perhaps even your powers of acting unconscious innocence may be taxed, clever as your countrywomen are acknowledged to be."

The baronet was perfectly calm now, and with exaggerated politeness handed his wife George Standish's note. As she read it the flushed cheek grew deadly pale, and her eyes large with an unknown fear. Never since those few letters received in Paris had Lord George written to her, and a dim horror of the power for evil which these hastily pencilled lines might have, seemed slowly paralyzing her. Yet even at

this supreme moment not one thought of blame for him crossed her mind, a thrill even of strange happiness came to her as she read the words: "should all the world desert you, one heart is yours for ever."

Stern moralists may frown, and those wise in their day and generation smile, we only write the truth.

For a few moments, although distinctly hearing her husband's voice, she was unconscious of the meaning of his words. Everything seemed crumbling away around her, and that terrible sense of being alone overpowered her whole being.

Sir Reginald talked on calmly, as though the most ordinary household arrangements were being discussed. He had already sent word that it would be impossible for them to keep their dinner engagement for that evening, the reasons given he did not deign to explain. Further, he told her that he should at once see his lawyer, and take immediate steps for obtaining a divorce —that she might remain in his house for the present, or leave it, exactly as suited her convenience—but that any defence she might wish to make had better be kept for the law to deal with, he would believe nothing she could say, and wished never to see her again.

Before Margaret had time to answer, her husband had left the room, and she was indeed "alone."

The sweet pictured face smiled on, but the living woman in passionate rebellion against the insults and outrage heaped upon her, rushed recklessly to the only refuge Fate seemed to give. Rapidly and incoherently she wrote to the man whose selfish vanity had blasted her life, and whose faults she was as blind to now as from the beginning. In agonizing words she implored him to come to her, to save her—then lighting a taper she sealed the letter with one word, "Fidèle," and bowing her head, wept bitterly.

Visions of rest, and peace, and love in some far-away land, beckoned with smiling faces, whispering in the loved tones she knew so well, of happy careless days, far from all strife and pain. Tenderly these murmuring voices soothed the poor little heart worn out with struggling and unrest, painting blissful joys for the weary, earthworn spirit as the daylight died, and the pictured face grew dim in the twilight—when suddenly, to the woman so sorely tempted, came still another voice, that of the stranger who in the stillness of the old stone abbey had so earnestly

implored for her and for all, "that peace which passeth all understanding."

Could there be "peace" in that smiling, flowery land toward which the visions wooed her?

With a shudder Margaret took the letter, and holding it to the still burning taper, watched it slowly consume away into a shapeless mass of ashes.

The maid Parker had scant time to pack her mistress's things for the train leaving for Paris the next evening. When she brought the letters to Lady Tompkins, there was amongst them one which, so soon as she was alone, Margaret kissed passionately, then placing it unopened in a blank envelope, she directed it to—

The
Lord George Standish,
— Victoria Street,
S.W.

CHAPTER XIV.

In such haste was Margaret to be gone from the house of her husband after her late interview with him, and so feverish was the excitement which had taken possession of her, that when she found still more than an hour remained before time to leave for the train, it seemed scarcely possible for her to restrain her impatience. Sir Reginald she had not seen since he left her alone the day before, but she knew he was dining out. Her own dinner had been brought to her dressing-room, but had been sent away almost untouched. It was only eight o'clock, and the train did not leave until nearly ten, how could she pass the intervening time in the stillness of that great lonely house, when every nerve was unstrung, and she felt that rapid motion and ceaseless movement were the only things she could bear? She wandered like a ghost from one to the other of the silent, empty rooms, all brilliantly lit to show that one pale stricken face with its weary eyes. Finally she entered the small drawing-room, and a shudder

came over her at the remembrance of the insulting language and coarse suspicions of her husband. Long time she gazed at the smiling Paris portrait which seemed to mock her from its gilded frame; so happy was the girl, so unutterably wretched the woman.

Three times a week flowers were sent from Sir Reginald's place in Leicestershire, and when Margaret could find time, she arranged herself the great bowls full of roses and heliotrope, and all the floral treasures which came wrapped in soft, wet moss, bringing the pure fragrance of the country into heated, dusty London; but to-day the groom of the chambers knew his mistress had no thoughts or time for such things, so he had filled the vases to the best of his ability, and the air was heavily scented with mingled perfumes, while everything around her spoke of luxury and comfort.

After extinguishing all the lights save one at the far end of the room, Margaret seated herself on a low divan near the open window, where a cool breeze calmed the fever heat in her brain, and the cold white moon looked down all unconscious of the strife and passion raging in the sorely tried heart. She had done her best, and what had it all come to? Was there any use

after all in striving for good, when it only seemed to bring helpless misery? and what, ah! what had been in the letter she had returned? All day this question had haunted her. What had he said? What words of help and comfort had she recklessly put away from her when in such sore need of them? But no, he too had deserted her, for twelve long hours had gone by since that mute message had gone to him in the fact that his own letter was returned, and he had not even felt enough curiosity to know what it meant. What was her life to be with no home, no position, no friends? and the one being she cared for barred from her sight for ever, because to see him was to sin? Almost she wished that she had *never* seen him, but quickly that thought was silenced. Rather all the pain she suffered now than never to have known the joy. But still the long years that must come and go stretched out before her as the trackless sea to the aching eyes of an exile, or the waste of desert sand to the traveller who has lost the guiding way, and sees no end to his wanderings. She could never again live the old life alone with her mother, they two sufficient unto themselves, for human hearts cannot be put back like the hands of a dial to any given point, and begin anew the

patient journey of time; human hearts are stubborn, with no well-regulated spring to direct their course within a hair's breadth to the right or to the left as the guiding hand may desire.

The breeze wafted the perfume of the roses nearer, just as a German band some distance off struck up the old Strauss waltz whose tones twice before had come to her in one of those supreme moments of life which burn themselves in upon the brain as corrosive acid will burn into tender flesh. She could not bear it, that swaying musical rhythm which told her of the first kiss of the man she loved, and must love for ever.

The spectral moonbeams fell softly around her as she buried her head in the silken cushions, but still the cruel music surged through her brain, to which no other sound came. She never heard the door open, or footsteps coming toward her, and not until her own name, spoken in the low, passionate tone she knew so well, fell upon her ear, did she realize that she was not alone. She started up, and the two pale faces looked at each other for a moment in silence.

"Margaret," he said again, "what is it? What has happened? Why did you send me back my note unopened? I have been out of

town all day, and only just found it on my return. What has happened?"

She drew away the hand he had taken, and passed it in a confused, helpless way over the tired eyes. Where could she begin? What was there to tell? He sat down opposite her, and leaned forward, anxiously waiting for her to speak.

"Your note yesterday—it was brought to Sir Reginald, and he accused me of all that is evil. I am going away for ever; but before that, before you wrote, I had meant to tell you that we must never meet again; I have been very blind and selfish; I never meant you to know—"

"That you love me!" he interrupted, unable to conceal the ring of triumph in his voice. "Margaret, my darling, at last! Say it once. Say that is what you mean. I have waited so long." He had fallen on his knees before her, and seized both the slender hands, which he kissed passionately.

"Yes, that is it," she answered with a sob in her voice, but in a dreamy far-away tone. All the world seemed nothing to her. They two alone existed in the pale white light of the moon, in that flower-scented air, with the dis-

tant strains of the music still surging through her brain like rushing waters. They two—alone. The voice of the preacher in the Abbey could not reach her through those living, passionate tones pleading for her happiness and his; painting such pictures as the whispered voices she had heard before could not equal, because these were drawn in warm living colours, and all the fire of a man's live passion. They two alone. What counted friendship or wisdom, worldly prudence or caution, honour itself, when love was all in all? They two—alone.

Suddenly the music ceased. A cloud passed before the moon's light, leaving them for an instant almost in darkness. A second time she drew away her hands, and stood up, pale and trembling, but with the dreamy look gone, and one of cold misery in its place.

"You are mad," she said hoarsely, "and I, too, worse than mad. I spoke truly when I told my husband I had done no wrong; would he believe me, could he see me now? If he could hear me say that I love you, have always loved you, and must love you to the end? No, he would spurn me as the vilest impostor, yet I will do no wrong save the one great one already past my helping. I cannot put the love out of my

heart with a wish, for no human being has accomplished that yet, but I can tell to you what I have promised to myself, that never again will I willingly see you or hear your voice. This much is in my power, for the rest perhaps some help may come, and aid me in tearing away the love itself. You pray me to go with you and trust to you. Have you no mercy? No pity for my weakness? Oh, my love, be generous! Be noble enough to help to save me from myself!"

"And yet at last, at last you confess that you love me! My darling, you ask an impossibility"—and he moved toward her, and would have taken her in his arms, but she motioned him away.

"No, if you love me as you say you do, go. Good-bye."

"And this is what you call love! This is your feeble woman's idea of it! I could sin any sin for you, commit any crime, while you can tell me in one breath that you love me, and in the next tell me to go! Good God, is it worth while loving so weak a thing as a woman!"

She trembled violently, but said nothing, only moved to the far end of the room, where a lamp

was burning brightly. She felt that she was beggared of peace for ever; felt also that before she could suffer more she must in some way find strength, for she was well-nigh spent.

George Standish followed her, and in a low, constrainedly quiet tone, which showed how difficult he found it to suppress his agitation, said quietly, "Listen to me, Margaret. Your husband has said that he will never see you again. Society will consider you in the wrong, for you are a woman. You have no child to claim your duty and allegiance, and your mother loves you too dearly not to wish for your happiness before all things. Think of your lonely life in all these years to come. If you will trust me, my whole future shall be the proof of how I love you, and I will shield you, and guard your happiness and comfort before my own life. In far countries, where none will know or care who we are, you shall find rest and peace. Come"—and he stretched out loving arms to the listening woman.

For the first time she realized all the cruel selfishness of the man she so blindly loved, yet no indignation came to her, she only felt a yearning pity for herself and him. The first thing learned by a woman who loves is forgive-

ness, for love wounds more cruelly than hate. Her idol was shattered, yet she grieved for the broken pieces which had formed so perfect a whole—until she knew. For now she did know. She felt his utter unworthiness; acknowledged the false plausibility of his loving arguments; saw the cruelty that recked nothing of her broken life and ruined peace, but only of his own gratification and success. Yet she smiled as a pitying angel might, for she loved him through it all.

Without speaking she touched the bell, and then held out her hand. "Good-bye, and God bless you." Before he could answer, the door opened and the footman stood awaiting her orders.

"You can take those things," she said quietly, pointing to some books and a travelling cloak; "it must be time to go."

"The brougham is at the door, my lady."

"Good-bye," she said once again, a mist coming before the burning, aching eyes as she spoke; and the presence of the servant prevented his making any reply excepting an ordinary adieu. Her maid was waiting, and entered the carriage with her, giving the order "to Charing Cross Station."

CHAPTER XV.

Madame Duclerc would very much have preferred not to receive the telegram which she had from Lady Bessemer-Tompkins on a certain scorching, glaring day in June. Margaret gave no time or chance for an answer. She simply announced that, accompanied by her maid, she would arrive that same evening in Paris, for she intended sleeping at Folkestone, and crossing to Paris the next day, and should come at once to the Pension in the Boulevard Malesherbes; that she cared nothing about the accommodation, and would be content with any room in the house.

After the terrible scene with Sir Reginald on that fatal Sunday evening, the unhappy woman felt that she could no longer remain under her husband's roof; yet where could she turn for shelter? Her mother was far across the sea. Mrs. Chandler, of whom she had seen a good deal during the three weeks preceding her marriage, and who, enlightened by Mr. Egerton, had understood and sympathized with the true state of affairs, was travelling on the Continent, and her

only real friend in England, Mrs. Montagu, was at the sea-side with a sick child. To no one could Lady Tompkins turn for aid or advice, and no refuge seemed open to her save the old French Pension.

Now serious events had happened in Madame Duclerc's usually quiet household during the last few days. Mr. Burns-Murray had never been quite himself since the illness of which she had written to Mrs. Gordon, and which Margaret had laughingly put down to too much writing. For the past two days now he had been so eccentric and excited in his manner, and so totally unlike the quiet, reserved gentleman, that Professor Chandler, who, with his wife, was staying at Madame Duclerc's, persuaded her to ask a celebrated physician for the insane to come and lunch with them, when, unknown himself, he might have an opportunity of carefully observing the unfortunate man, whom they all suspected of being mad. The doctor's verdict had been most unhesitatingly pronounced—the man was a lunatic, who at any moment might become dangerous, and arrangements were promptly made to secure his removal at dusk that very evening.

Lady Bessemer-Tompkins' train must arrive a few hours earlier, and the physician was of the

opinion that there would be no difficulty at all in taking the wretched man quietly away after she had gone to her room, and decided that it was best to say nothing to her upon the subject. Everything had been settled, men were to be in waiting in the dining-room downstairs, and a carriage ready in the court-yard. The name of one of Mr. Burns-Murray's friends, in fact almost his only visitor, was to be sent to him, as requesting to speak to him for a moment below, and he was in this way to be enticed into quietly going downstairs, where the men awaited him. Thus everything would be accomplished so quietly that no disturbance could occur. Unfortunately no one took into consideration the curious cunning of the insane, which at times seems almost to gift them with second sight.

Madame Duclerc was shocked at Margaret's white face, and the haggard look of misery in the beautiful eyes. She forgot that the girl was now a great lady with title, position, and money; she remembered only little Maggie Gordon, of Ashton, whom she had loved as her own child, and she tended and cared for the weary traveller, her heart aching the while to see how changed she was from the radiant creature who had left her not two years since.

"I thought you might be tired after your journey, dear child, and so have ordered Marie to bring your dinner on a tray to your own room; do you mind?"

"Oh no, chère madame, I like much better to be quiet to-night. Whom have you here now?—it was very inconsiderate of me to come without warning, but I knew of no other place. Are the Chandlers still here?"

"Yes, and the Reverend Mr. Hunt, but they have all gone to Versailles, and will not be back until rather late. They left much love and welcome for you."

"And poor Mr. Burns-Murray, I suppose he has gone; was he all right when he left?"

"Oh, I hope so, poor man; but I am truly glad to see you again, *chérie*, and you see I have given you the same old room, that you may feel at home again."

"Only the dear mother is not here," she answered with a sad little smile.

"No, but we will try and make you as comfortable as possible without Madame Gordon. Your door locks beautifully now. Do you remember how stiff an old fastening it was?—but now that is all arranged, and your *femme de chambre* has the room just above. Are you

sleepy, and do you think you shall soon go to bed?"

"Yes; if you will send Parker to me, I think I will say good-night now, early as it is, for I am very tired."

"And your door, my child, do not forget that your door locks well"—and with devout prayers that she had done wisely, and that no mischief might arrive from not having mentioned the state of affairs to Margaret, Madame Duclerc descended to the *salle-à-manger*, where the men from the asylum were already waiting, prepared to carry off the wretched madman.

Lady Bessemer-Tompkins soon dismissed the puzzled Parker, who yet had her own ideas upon the subject of this sudden journey from London in the height of the season, and who totally and entirely disapproved of the same.

Worn out in mind and body, the poor child fell into a heavy, dreamless sleep, while exciting scenes were being enacted in the Pension.

Everything happened exactly as the physician had arranged that it should; the men arrived, and placed themselves in the *salle-à-manger*, the close carriage was waiting in the court-yard, and Marie knocked at Mr. Burns-Murray's door shortly

after eight o'clock, saying that his friend Mr. Macgregor wished to speak to him for only a moment, downstairs, as he had no time to come up.

On the staircase above, near Margaret's door, the physician, Madame Duclerc, and the terrified Parker watched in silence and darkness as the door opened, and Mr. Burns-Murray, candle in hand, came slowly out of his room, looking carefully and suspiciously about him before descending. Then at each step he stopped, and raising the light, again cautiously looked around with a mingled expression of distrust and cunning in his eyes, painful to behold. The progress down the winding staircase was so slow and long that one of the men below imprudently looked out of the dining-room to see what caused the delay, when like a frightened hare the maniac turned and fled to his own room again, locking the door behind him before any of the watchers could possibly prevent it. The physician was furious, and knowing too well that there was now no hope of taking him quietly, said they must resort to force.

"If it comes to the worst, we must break the door in, madame; therefore you had better inform the English lady, who is sure to be

awakened by the noise, and either stay with her or take her upstairs, as you will."

Madame Duclerc knocked several times, but there was no answer, and the doctor, impatient to finish with this lunatic, who had outwitted him, said they would make as little noise as possible, and she would probably sleep on undisturbed. The two women he imperatively ordered to a side landing on the staircase below, and calling up his men, he himself knocked at Mr. Burns-Murray's door, trying once more if stratagem might be of use; but the last touch needed to entirely overthrow the poor tottering brain had been given by seeing the man whom instinct warned him was in waiting to drag him to a living tomb, and the lunatic, losing all control over himself, broke out into violent ravings with savage threats of murder and death to all who approached him.

As in a confused dream, Margaret heard voices and knocking, and then these violent ravings in the loud unnatural voice, until at last, thoroughly aroused, she sat up in bed, and discovered that the dream was a reality, and that something very extraordinary was going on. Softly opening her door, she saw a few steps from her five men with white, anxious faces, and heard the same un-

natural voice in horrible curses and imprecations coming from the closed door of Mr. Burns-Murray's room.

"Dare only to touch me, and the first who lays a finger upon me is a dead man—yes, at the first sound I hear, I fire, and no living thing shall pass my door!"

Silently and without a word the five men disappeared, taking the light with them, and still the madman raved, with Margaret, terrified, helpless, and in perfect darkness, his only listener. Had every one deserted her, and left her alone to the mercy of a lunatic? Good God, was a horrible death in this black darkness to be her fate, or would she too go mad with terror?

"Ah, you have gone, you cowards—afraid of one man against many. You have left me and gone, have you, but I listen for every sound, and the first footstep which comes to my door shall never pass it alive. I call God to witness"—and here followed such curses and ravings that the girl's very heart stood still with fear. Oh for some friendly human voice! She could not stay alone with this poor maddened wretch, she dared not pass his door to go below, where the others had fled for safety. Weak and exhausted

by the terrible scenes she had gone through before leaving her own home, physically weary and worn out, startled from a deep sleep, and left in silence and darkness, where only a thin partition separated her from a dangerous maniac threatening to fire at the first sound, Margaret felt that her own brain must give way, could she not soon escape from her terrible position.

At last she heard the madman walk rapidly across his room, and in desperation she crept softly in the darkness by the closed door, which, once passed, by the light left burning on the floor below she could see where she was; then flying in terror until she reached the side landing, where the rest of the party were gathered together, she fell unconscious to the ground, as Reuben Hunt hurried forward to meet her.

CHAPTER XVI.

Lovingly and tenderly they wooed her back to life in the long summer days which followed that awful night, but the weeks stretched into months

before the gray-haired physician could give them hope that she would ever recover from the brain fever which succeeded the excitement and suffering she had gone through.

The Chandlers and Mr. Hunt had intended passing the summer together in Switzerland, but instead of this the professor was sent off upon a solitary tour, while his wife and the young clergyman remained throughout the scorching days of July and August in white, glaring Paris, where they would not desert Margaret during her long illness.

It nearly broke their hearts to hear the sweet, plaintive voice pleading in delirium with some unseen accuser.

"No, no, believe me, I was never guilty! Weak and foolish, if you will, but never sinful! Oh, believe me, when I tell you the very, very truth!"

George Standish's name never passed her lips; he seemed to have gone out for ever from the life he had so recklessly ruined, but from all that Mr. Egerton had told her, and the few broken sentences Margaret herself had murmured in her unconsciousness, Mrs. Chandler guessed how matters were, and grieved over the broken happiness of the girl she had learned to love.

Poor Reuben's holiday for health's sake was rather a failure, as Paris in midsummer is trying even at the best of times; but not for one moment did he think of himself, his only care being for the woman he had hoped to make his wife, and whom he had loved since her baby-hood.

"My leave of absence is up in November, Mrs. Chandler, and I cannot ask to have it extended; do you think she will be quite recovered then?"

"Doctor Blantyre hopes so, and certainly by that time she must be so much better that you can leave without fear; but an idea has come to me—if she is able to stand the voyage, why should she not return with you, and join Mrs. Gordon in America? I feel certain it would be the very best thing possible, if it can be managed. The change and sea voyage, and rest in her native mountain air, would be the saving of the child, mentally, as well as physically."

"If she will consent, I shall be only too glad to take her over, and I quite agree with you that it would be decidedly the best thing. Has Sir Reginald written again?"

"No, not since that first note in answer to mine, telling of her illness."

"You never showed me that note; what did he say in it?"

"I have kept it for you—" and going to her writing-table, Mrs. Chandler took from it a letter, which she handed to Reuben. It was very short, merely acknowledging the receipt of the letter from her informing him of his wife's illness—not a sign of interest in her, nor a word of his intentions toward her. Mr. Hunt was indignant.

"Do you mean to say this is all?"

"All from Sir Reginald, but Mr. Egerton writes that the idea of getting a divorce had to be given up; there is no possible ground upon which to obtain one."

"And the other one?" asked Reuben, in low passionate tones, his face dark and stern.

"I have never told you—he came twice to ask after her, but I did not see him, I could not. I believe he stayed on in Paris for some time, and once or twice spoke with Madame Duclerc, but I know nothing more; I have never asked."

The strong man turned away in silence. Did he, too, remember the poet's words:—

"What is life—what is death—
What is false—what is true?"

"I fancy the baronet would be the last to oppose a visit to America," Mrs. Chandler said gently. "You see, Margaret would join her mother there, and could return with her whenever she pleased."

And so it was arranged. Margaret herself, too languid and weak to care very much what became of her, listened in silence, and consented to all the plans discussed and settled by Mrs. Chandler and Reuben. The latter had always taken care of her, why not now? It seemed only natural that Reuben should take all trouble and responsibility, and do everything for her, and she trusted him completely.

Madame Duclerc had never forgiven herself for having, even unintentionally, allowed Margaret to be terrified by the events of the dreadful night when Mr. Burns-Murray had been carried off a hopeless lunatic, and although the physician had assured her that it was previous mental distress which had in reality brought on brain fever, she could not do enough to prove her regret for the events which had certainly hastened the long illness.

The steamer *Sainte Claire* was to sail from Havre on the 5th of November, and Professor Chandler had returned to Paris in time to accompany his

wife and the invalid to that place, Reuben Hunt leaving a day previously, that all might be in readiness for their reception.

The good-byes had all been said, the messages for friends at home all given, and for several days now Margaret had enjoyed the rest and fresh sea-breezes, in which she was growing quite strong again, and more like herself. The ocean had so far been calm as the old mill-pond at Ashton, and the passengers congratulated themselves upon the comfort of a quiet voyage and prospect of a speedy arrival.

"It is too bad to suggest your going below, Margaret, but I am afraid it is getting too chilly for you on deck. Do you mind coming down now?"

"I suppose I must, Reuben, you are such a tyrant," she replied, with something of the old wilful tone; "but it is only just nine o'clock, and see what a bright starlight night it is."

"I know; but, remember, you are not even yet quite so strong as you used to be, and I am bound to hand you over to the mother looking like your old self again. You do look ten per cent. better than when we left Paris."

"High interest that, Reuben—have I really improved so much? How good you all were to

me, I can never forget it; and to think that in three or four days now we shall see the mother, and be back in America! I did not know that I cared for the country at all, and now I love it, even poor stupid little Ashton, which I used to abuse so unmercifully. And we shall be there in time for the lovely fall weather, the time of the year I like best, if only the leaves will wait for us, my beloved crimson and scarlet maples I am so fond of."

Thus chatting they left the deck, and passed through the saloon, where a few of the passengers preferred cards, books, or work to fresh air and starlight, and where preparations for supper had already commenced.

"I will go at once to my state-room, Reuben; I really cannot stand the smell of sardines on toast and hot whisky and water after that delicious sea air, so good-night—how nice it is to think that we are 'one day nearer home.'"

Margaret lay quietly in her berth while the monotonous sound of the waves plashing against the side of the vessel, and the regular drone of the machinery, soon closed the drowsy eyes and soothed the busy brain almost to slumber, when suddenly there came a terrific crash, and the great steamer shook to its very centre; then a

long, grating sound, and a final throb, as the engines were stopped. For an instant she remained quite still and almost stunned, then hurriedly rising, partially dressed herself, and wrapped a long fur cloak over her hasty toilet, just as Reuben Hunt appeared at her cabin door. By the dim lamp in her state-room she could see that he was deadly pale, but a calm steady light shone in his eyes, and in a quiet voice he told her they had struck a rock or steamer, he could not tell which, as he had come to her direct from the smoking-room, the instant after the collision.

Margaret felt strangely still, as with her hand in his she followed Reuben through the deserted saloon, where broken plates and glasses, cards, books, &c., were scattered about in the wildest confusion.

And oh, the sight which met her eye when they reached the deck she had left so peaceful and quiet only an hour ago! It was no steamer, nor yet rock, against which their vessel had struck, but a huge iceberg, looking like some grand floating cathedral, its spires and arches gleaming in the starlight, the whole fast fading away in the distance, as silently as it had come, cold, beautiful, deadly in its awful power of destruction.

As very ghosts were all those terrified figures, with faces ashy gray, some huddled in small groups together, others hurrying singly with orders for the men lowering the boats, who were to examine as to the amount of damage done by the ice-fiend, now quite out of sight.

"No watch on deck." The words came to her ear, but brought no meaning with them. A few moments passed, and the men and women with haggard faces drew closer to each other, still silent, but with wild questioning eyes, mutely asking for hope when there was no hope to give, and then slowly the great vessel sank lower and lower, as the water rushed in beneath, where the sharp, cruel ice-fangs had torn open gaping wounds. A terrible stillness held all spell-bound, and with the awful silence of despair those three hundred souls awaited their dreadful doom.

Margaret shuddered as she saw the dark, black waters curling and writhing in the starlight, and clung trembling to her companion. One swift thought backward to the home and husband she had left, and the man who had ruined her life, one sob of pain for the mother who should never again on earth clasp her to the loving heart, and still the brave ship sank slowly, lower and lower into the treacherous water, waiting hungrily for

its prey, and even as in her dream so long ago, Margaret felt herself going down, down into the cold, cruel waves, closely folded to Reuben Hunt's trusted, faithful heart.

* * * * * *

Hyde Park was gay with human flowers one bright Sunday morning during the hour of the fashionable "church parade," when society, having attended to the prescribed needs of its little souls, now exhibited many well-dressed bodies who were grouped in twos and threes, or walked one with another under the shady branches.

The little Orme children were playing with Zip and Laddie, their favourite dogs, while their mother talked to Lady Hilda Brabazon and Mr. Egerton.

"I never sit at this particular corner without thinking of that poor little girl you introduced to me here on just such a sunny June day as this. What a sad fate her's was!"

"You did not see much of her after her marriage, did you? I myself so heartily detested Sir Reginald that I seldom had much to do with them, although I always liked the girl," was Lady Hilda's answer; "and I think she was very hardly dealt with."

"I wonder how much she knows as to her brother's share in that hard dealing," thought Granvill Egerton savagely, as he pulled his moustache and listened to the two ladies. "Of all George's social sins, that one ought to count heaviest against him."

Strangely enough, another group a little lower down the walk were also discussing Margaret Gordon, or, more properly speaking, Lady Bessemer-Tompkins, and Mrs. Thurloe's laugh grated unpleasantly upon Mrs. Montagu's ear as she asked carelessly what had become of the old mother after the daughter had disappeared?

"Oh, she committed suicide or something in Paris, did she not? I mean the girl herself, not the mother," Mrs. Kilpatrick asked with even less concern.

"Suicide! How can you!" exclaimed Mrs. Montagu, indignantly; "the poor thing was lost at sea, after a dreadful illness in Paris. You have confused things."

"But I thought she went off with an old love who turned up very opportunely after the row with Sir Reginald? One could hardly blame her for getting rid of him, and I do wish she had married Algy."

"You are quite, quite wrong," said Mrs. Mon-

tagu again. "Mrs. Chandler wrote me the whole account; and it was an old friend of the family, a clergyman, and a man who had known her since her babyhood, who was taking charge of her until she could meet her mother in America."

"Well, George Standish seems to have survived her loss. I hear he is amusing himself in Paris with some other fair American—he seems to fancy the nation," and as she spoke Mrs. Kilpatrick, who had spent her morning in the slums of the East End charities, glanced maliciously at Mrs. Thurloe.

"Do you know they say Sir Reginald Tompkins is engaged to Lady Grace, after all," interrupted Colonel Burton, who joined the group at this moment. "She certainly is a sufficient contrast to Miss Gordon in looks, at any rate. What a beauty that little girl was!" And so in careless fashion they talked of the poor passionate heart whose restless beatings were still at last, and who could never more be troubled by the society chatter about her and her sad, short life.

* * * * * *

Those who kneel reverently by freshly-made graves, and tenderly, in loving remembrance, place sweet fresh flowers above the quiet dead,

sleeping so peacefully in prayer-hallowed ground, guarded by warm living hearts and hands, ask, as they remember all they have lost, "Can any sorrow be like unto my sorrow?"

Could they but look into the heart of the waiting mother, waiting through dreary days, and months, and years, for news of the ship that never comes. Starting from waking dreams where visions of all the dangers to those upon the great deep take horrid form and shape. Hearing in the dead of night, as the weary nights stretch on, sharp cries of "fire"—which wake her only to darkness and solitude. Listening to the howling wind and beating rain, while through the midnight watches she prays for those "in peril on the sea"—or closing the aching eyes which even in the brilliant light of day see cold, cruel waves curling around their victims. The sharp collision, the hidden rocks, the pitiless iceberg, she thinks of all in turn. Hope struggles with despair, and only unbroken silence comes to both. Oh that silence! No cry of the mother's anguish, no prayer, no patience, no will to do, can break that awful silence, which must last until the sea shall give up its dead.

More than two years had passed since the *Sainte Claire* had sailed from Havre, having on

board 300 souls. The Chandlers were again abroad, and often wrote to Mrs. Gordon, still waiting alone in the old stone house on the hill for those who "would never come back to the land."

The mountain-sides were glowing with colour, clothed in their brilliant autumnal dress, and daily did the lone woman deck the stiff, old-fashioned rooms with gorgeous leaves, scarlet, and crimson, and gold, which Margaret loved so well.

It was the hour for the midday post, and Mrs. Gordon waited, as she always did, by the entrance gate, that she might the sooner receive any news from beyond the sea. There were no letters to-day, only two London papers directed in Mrs. Chandler's well-known hand. Two paragraphs were marked; in the *Morning Post* she read:—

"On the 18th inst., at St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, by the Rev. Montagu Villiers, vicar, Sir Reginald Bessemer-Tompkins, Bart., to Lady Grace Hamond, youngest daughter of the Earl of Treherne."

And in the London *World* of the same date, the following:—

"Society is on the *qui vive* to hear further particulars

of an approaching divorce case, which promises to be particularly exciting. The principal *dramatis personæ* are a young married beauty, well known in the American colony in Paris, wife of a wealthy American, who is also a celebrated sportsman, while the diplomat who has won the fickle affections of the lady is scion of a ducal house, and has already upon several occasions played the *rôle* of Lothario with unrivalled success."

Mrs. Gordon shaded her eyes from the autumn sunshine, just as she had done on a bright October day only a few years ago, and saw again in imagination her little daughter bringing the English stranger to their hospitable home.

Had it been a dream, that short brilliant experience in foreign lands, with its tragic ending? Was the world of to-day just the same as it was then? Marrying and giving in marriage, loving and hating, happy and miserable?

And the hours stretched on, and the purple hills grew misty in the distance, and the pale stars looked down upon the peaceful New Hampshire village, yet still the woman's tired heart had found no answer to the puzzling questions:—

> "What is life—what is death—
> What is false—what is true?"

FINIS.

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